Erasing agency: representations of women terrorists and the intersection of gender, race and ethnicity
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ERASING AGENCY: REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN TERRORISTS AND THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, RACE AND ETHNICITY

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INTRODUCTION

The discipline of International Relations (IR) has been described as a "crudely patriarchal" (Walker 1992: 179) and as "one of the most masculinist" fields of social science (Pettman 2001: 583). Feminist theory has therefore made a significant and indeed necessary incursion into the discipline. More recently, however, post-colonial IR theorists have highlighted important weaknesses of feminist IR theory, particularly its neglect of the relationship between gender, neo-imperialism and race (Chowdhry and Nair 2002). This essay shall consider the juncture/disjuncture between feminist theory and post-colonial theory in IR, by considering representations of Chechen women terrorists. I will argue that the actions of Chechen women terrorists need to be considered through the lenses of both feminism and post-colonialism. To illustrate this, I shall draw upon several accounts that have utilised feminist theory to analyse the actions of Chechen women terrorists. I shall then highlight that despite the advances made by feminist scholars in their analyses of women terrorists, it is also important to incorporate post-colonial perspectives in order to address how gender intersects with race and ethnicity and nationality. Feminist and post-colonial theories indeed overlap significantly. To treat them separately here is to highlight both the value and diversity of

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each theoretical approach and to acknowledge that post-colonial theory locates its origins in a critique of Western feminist scholarship. Of particular importance to the purposes of this essay is that both feminist and post-colonial theories in IR emphasise the importance of issues of representation. Arguing the case for post-colonial theory, Chowdhry and Nair write:

> *Unveiling the practices of power in IR requires at the very least an engagement with the problem of representation and its racialised and gendered implications.* (2004: 17)

For feminist theory, Pilcher and Whelehan explain:

> *Representation is important not least because of the images of women reflected back to them may be objectionable, but also because they tell us something about how women's lives are valued and the difficulties in being represented (more literally) in the public sphere.* (2006: 139)

The discussion to follow will take up these concerns in relation to the representations of Chechen women terrorists in mainstream online news media. As West so argues, mainstream online news media is a crucial site from which to investigate problems of representation. The media, as West argues, contribute to the production of myths and provide stories that "...make sense of a society for a society" (Lule, in West 2005: 5). Juxtaposing the ways in which feminist theory and post-colonial theory engage with problems of representation in relation to news coverage of Chechen women terrorists is thus a way to deconstruct these myths and stories, or narratives, which are processes of making meaning.

Post-colonial theorists have produced significant analyses that have explored the uneven effects of globalisation. As Walker argues, this has been manifested most clearly in growing inequalities of ethnicity, race, class, gender and nation (Walker 2008: 9). Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), as Chowdhry and Nair highlight, is a critical point of entry into the field of post-colonial theory in IR (Moore-Gilbert 1997 in Chowdhry and Nair 2002: 12). Post-colonial scholars argue that to fully understand the political dimensions of Orientalism, in both its historical context and contemporary

reconfigurations, both race and ethnicity *and gender* must be scrutinized (Nayak 2006: 46). Mainstream representations of Chechen women terrorists reflect Orientalist assumptions that rely on the imbrications of both race and ethnicity and gender. By and large, these Orientalist discourses frame Chechen women terrorists to be helpless victims, motivated by personal or familial grievances, not political purposes. As West points out, despite the fact that terrorism is a political act, no one has yet paused to consider the political goals of women terrorists (West (2005: 9)). Adopting a post-colonial theoretical approach in relation to the increasing involvement of Chechen women in terrorist activities is an attempt to illustrate Orientalism's pervasiveness in contemporary politics, and of how this operates in the reproduction of power asymmetries. In other words, by adopting a post-colonial approach to the study of global politics, we can understand the role of particular types of representational practices in the formation and reproduction of international hierarchies (Biswas 2004: 186). The following section shall consider contributions of feminist IR in relation to the increase in women terrorists in Chechnya before comparing this contribution with my own analysis that shall be framed by post-colonial theory.

FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
AND VIOLENCE

Gendered identities are magnified during times of violent conflict. Steans explains that gender is a system of meaning, manipulated during times of war to generate support from both men and women for the war (2006: 49). Steans also points to the power and pervasiveness of myths regarding men's 'natural' capacity for violence, aggression and dominances *vis-à-vis* women's 'natural' peaceful, submissive and passive disposition (2006: 49). Similar to Steans, Blanchard (2003: 1305) suggests that feminist analyses of the 'gendered war/peace nexus' have provided a greater array of empirical evidence which have enhanced our understanding of issues such as women warriors, women peace workers, militarized masculinities and wartime sexual violence. Thus conflict and war are critical sites from which to explore the complexities and multiplicities

of masculinities and femininities. Notwithstanding factors such as economic resources, weaponry, strategy and public opinion, Eichler argues that the ability of any state to wage war also relies in part on particular notions of masculinity and femininity (2006: 491). Following Eichler, I agree that war, conflict and violence need to be understood in terms of material capabilities, *and* in terms of the intersubjective construction of gendered identities, and how they are subsequently manipulated and promulgated. In the context of the Russian-Chechen conflict, Eichler's analysis demonstrates the importance of gender to the Russian government's policy of war and the responses of citizens to this policy (Eichler 2006: 501). Following Eichler, I shall consider the ways in which representations of Chechen women terrorists pivot around particular constructions of femininity.

Jessica West 2005 article considering media representations of Chechen women terrorists advances the debate of feminism within IR and representations of women terrorists. West considers the ways in which the "practice of international relations" produces a version of both hegemonic masculinity and 'hegemonic femininity' (2005: 5). West's analysis provides a useful framework to question the salience of both the reproduction of gendered identities in the theory and practice of IR, and how this is reflected in representations of women terrorists. West focuses on two British, and one American, news providers: the BBC, *The Guardian* and CNN and their coverage of Chechen women terrorists. She argues that a feminist analysis of media coverage of the participation of women in war reveals the reproduction of gender roles, including the masculine/feminine divisions of international/private and political/apolitical (West 2005: 8).

West highlights that the BBC, *The Guardian* and CNN rely on the term 'Black Widow' to frame the terrorist actions of Chechen women. West illustrates how the term 'Black Widow' pivots around understandings of femininity and masculinity, differentiating women them from their male counterparts by invoking familial concept of sacrifice (2005: 5). Nacos, similar to West, describes how the "catchy soundbite 'Black Widows'" (2005: 440) invokes an image of:

The widow, clad from head to toe in black… the vengeance-seeking widow who becomes a terrorist because her husband was killed by Russian troops—a woman with a strong personal rather than political motive (Nacos, 2005: 440).

Nacos and West both illustrate that the terrorist actions of Chechen women are framed by their family relations, their violent actions a result of their personal or familial circumstances. The actions of women terrorists in the context of the Russian-Chechen conflict are rendered as personally, not politically, motivated. Although these women are operating outside familial and domestic realms, their terrorist activity is framed in terms of their relationships to male relatives.

Representing the actions of Chechen women terrorists in connection with family relations fuels the intersubjective construction of masculine and feminine identities. Women terrorists are defined in comparison to their male counterparts - as West suggests, women are variously labelled as 'Black Widows', victims, or as apolitical actors. In contrast, men are represented as 'terrorists', aggressors and political actors. Ultimately, the Chechen conflict is represented as a war between men (West 2005: 8).

Women are labelled as apolitical actors, while men are represented as 'terrorists'

What West describes here is an example of the ways in which gendered dichotomies construct masculine and feminine identities. Feminist theory has been at the forefront of the critique of dichotomous thinking that produces and sustains hierarchies of difference (Pilcher and Whelehan 2006: 24-25). A crucial feature of dichotomies, or binaries, is they present "either/or pairings" in an asymmetrical power dynamic; for example public/private, domestic/international, culture/nature, reason/emotion, masculine/feminine (Pilcher and Whelehan 2006: 24-25). In these sets, public, international, culture, reason and masculine are valued above their counterparts which are feminised or associated with feminine attributes. The representations of Chechen women terrorists pivot around gendered dichotomies that associate men exclusively with violence, politically motivated actions and aggression

and women with peace, aggressive/passive, political/apolitical and so forth.

Struckman's analysis of gender representations in the documentary film *Terror in Moscow* further illustrates the pervasiveness of myths and narratives that frame women's terrorist actions in connection to their relationships with men. Struckman connects these representations to the myth that women terrorists are bound to terrorism through their relationships with men (2006: 351). *Terror in Moscow* is a documentary film of the 2003 Dubravka theatre siege where nearly one half of the rebels who participated in the siege were Chechen women (Struckman 2006: 347). Struckman highlights that the documentary makes no attempt to explain the terrorist actions of men during the siege, and instead seeks to explain women's involvement (2006: 351). Not questioning the actions of men, and focusing instead on women reinforces the assumption that it is natural for men to be violent (Struckman 2006: 351). Violent women, on the other hand, are represented as anomalous and therefore require explanation. This is underpinned by the strong, almost axiomatic association of femininity with non-violence and reinforces the gendered divisions between "international/private and political/apolitical" (West 2005: 8). What West, Nacos and Struckman all highlight is that the actions of Chechen women terrorists are understood in relation to prevailing feminine ideals, meaning that any sense of their political agency is erased and their actions, albeit violent, destructive and political, are rendered as understandable only in connection to their relationships with men.

> The victimisation of female suicide bombers serves only to reinforce gender stereotypes

Following from the feminist analysis discussed above, the remainder of this essay shall build on West's framework, and argue that indeed the androcentric bias of much of mainstream IR is problematic. Illustrative of this are representations of Chechen women terrorists which depoliticise their actions, overshadowing their agency. However, what is also important, and largely absent from West's argument, is that these concepts should also be understood within the context of gender, and race and ethnicity. Or

more specifically, that these representations benefit from being understood in relation to post-colonial theory and 'Orientalism'. Nino Kemoklidze (2009: 192), like West, Struckman and Nacos, argues that the victimisation of the female suicide bombers serves only to reinforce extant gender stereotypes. I will contend that these stereotypes need to be understood not only in terms of gender, but also of race and ethnicity.

ORIENTALISM AND POST-COLONIAL THEORY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to provide a full account of the depth and complexity of post-colonial scholarship, in the following section I will briefly summarise some key aspects of post-colonial theory in IR and situate Said's work *Orientalism* within this framework. Post-colonial theory emerged from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, cultural and literary studies. Post-colonial theory in IR reflects these interdisciplinary origins, challenging the ontological and methodological limits of conventional IR. Post-colonial theory in IR is concerned with the ways in which race, class and gender intersect in the construction of power asymmetries (Chowdhry and Nair 2002: 2). It seeks to investigate the continuing role of imperialism in the construction and reproduction of contemporary hierarchies and relations of power and domination (Chowdhry and Nair 2002: 12). To repeat, Said's *Orientalism* has been central to the development of post-colonial theory in IR. According to Chowdhry and Nair, Said demonstrated that racialised knowledge was crucial to the spread and maintenance of imperialism (2002: 12). For Said, the Orient is defined in opposition to the West. Whereas the West is developed, rational and superior, the Orient is regarded as undeveloped and inferior (Said 1979: 300-301). Nayak, building on Said, contends that at the core of Orientalism are epistemological and ontological distinctions between the Self and Other, distinctions that depend on an image of the Other as mysterious, dark and dangerous (2006: 43).

Importantly, Orientalism is a pervasive discourse and entails a long history of perceiving 'other' (read: non-Western) women as

irrational, childlike and submissive. It enables a simplistic division of the world into the Orient or Periphery, the zone of ignorance, poverty, state failure, oppression and terrorism; and the West or the Core, the zone of peace, progressiveness and prosperity, the provider and teacher of democracy and good governance (Nayak, 2006: 46). Similar to the incursions of feminist theory in IR, post-colonial theory is concerned with the intersubjective constructions of self/other, Orient/Occident, subject/object. Moreover, post-colonial scholarship is concerned with the ways in which race, ethnicity, gender, class and nationality intersect within these constructions. This theoretical framework is often referred to as 'intersectionality' which according to Davis (2008) seeks to highlight the interaction between gender, race and other categories of difference and how these interactions impact individual lives, social practices, institutional configurations and cultural ideologies. Furthermore, intersectionality seeks to uncover how power circulates and operates in these settings (Davis 2008: 68).

In the following section I shall employ this theoretical framework and return to West's analysis of mainstream media representations of Chechen women terrorists, in order to illustrate that representations of female suicide bombers, which rely on their victimisation, do nothing but underline existing gender stereotypes (Kemoklidze 2009:192). Moreover that these gender stereotypes cannot be understood in isolation from other categories such as race and ethnicity. In order to illustrate this I shall build upon West's 2005 study of mainstream media representations of Chechen women terrorists in comparison with representations of the April 2010 Moscow bombings. Whilst West provides an important analysis of the ways in which gender is implicated in these media representations, I shall illustrate that it is also crucial to consider gender and race and ethnicity. In arguing from this theoretical position, I shall highlight that concepts like race and ethnicity are useful in order to deconstruct and critique the representations of Chechen women terrorists. I however do not use the concepts of race, ethnicity, culture and nationality unproblematically; my use of inverted commas for the term 'race' denotes the contested character of the concept (Pilcher and Whelehan 2006: 133).

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF CHECHEN WOMEN TERRORISTS

Mia Bloom (2007: 100) notes that it is estimated that terrorist attacks carried out by women receive eight times the media coverage of attacks perpetrated by men. Media representations are therefore a particularly interesting site from which to consider the ways in which gender intersects with race and ethnicity in the case of Chechen women terrorists. West conducted searches for terms such as 'Chechen' and 'women' and then refined the search to include references to 'terrorism' or 'suicide' (2005: 5). Similar to West, I conducted searches for terms 'Chechen' and 'women', on the sites of *The Guardian*, the BBC and *Aljazeera's* English news site and limited the search to include coverage of the recent March 2010 attacks on Moscow's metro system.[i] Considering *Aljazeera* instead of CNN adds a further variable to assess the predominance of the themes and representations considered here. Are they unique to British and American mainstream media, or are they also prevalent in 'non-Western' media texts? Particularly in the context of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the popularity of *Aljazeera* effectively ended the near monopoly over global news that had been long-enjoyed by American and other Western media (Seib 2005:601). *Aljazeera* styles itself upon offering an alternative media source to mainstream European or US based media outlets; as senior *Aljazeera* editor Faisal Bodi remarked, *Aljazeera* is "a 'corrective' to the official line that the Western media embraced" in relation to the the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (in Seib, 2005: 602). To include the *Aljazeera* English site's coverage of Chechen women terrorists here is to step away from West's analysis which includes only British and American news sources, following this idea that *Aljazeera* is a 'corrective' to mainstream media, and to consider if *Aljazeera*'s coverage does offer an 'alternative' representation. Indeed *Aljazeera*'s claims of 'alterity' have been subject to criticism, although unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this essay to consider these debates here (Iskander 2005: 209 provides a detailed critique and discussion). The following section shall therefore employ post-colonial theory, stemming specifically from Said's work *Orientalism*, as a framework to consider representations of Chechen women terrorists as reported by online news sources *The Guardian*, the BBC and *Aljazeera*'s English news site.

[i] *The author would like to acknowledge the anonymous reviewer who suggested considering Aljazeera.*

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND ORIENTALISM

Interestingly, it is a report from *Aljazeera* by Barker that attempts to shift from the term 'Black Widow'. Barker's report traces her travels to Balakhani, the home of Maryam Sharipova, who is described as a "28-year-old teacher allegedly turned suicide bomber" (2010). In the report, titled "From teacher to 'Moscow Bomber'", Barker visits both the family of Sharipova and the school where she was deputy principal and an IT specialist (2010). Barker writes that:

> *Investigators suspect that Sharipova had carried out the mission to avenge the death of her first husband, a Jordanian national known among fighters as "Doctor Mohammad", who had come to the North Caucasus in the mid 1990s. He was killed in 2009 during a special-forces operation. Doctor Mohammed had been friends with Magomedali Vagapov, another wanted fighter who, it is believed, later married Sharipova.* (2010)

This contrasts significantly to the parents of Sharipova who Barker reports were baffled by the notion that their daughter was a 'Black Widow'. Her parents, as Barker reports, have their own theories, which include that she was kidnapped, the victim of a revenge attack, or that her death was simply the will of Allah (ibid). Including Sharipova's parents' explanations, Barker's account appears to challenge the 'Black Widow' explanation to some extent. However, Barker's visit to Sharipova's home and the interview of her parents reflects a trend that involves an increasing urge to find some sort of personal story to explain the actions of particular female suicide bombers, and trend that is not necessarily apparent when suicide bombings involve men (Kemoklidze 2009: 186). This again reinforces the assumption that women become terrorists because of personal, not political reasons.

Similar to the narrative behind the 'Black Widow', the father's narration involving kidnapping, revenge and the will of Allah precludes the possibility of considering that Sharipova was politically motivated to carry out these attacks. If we contrast the statements of the family with Young's description of 'Orientalist framing', it

could be argued further that the erasure of agency rests upon the identity of Sharipova as both women and 'non-Western', or in this context Muslim. Youngs, building on Said's work, defines 'Orientalist framing' as the positing of Western culture and identity against its Eastern other, with the attendant distinctions between the two that have been outlined above (2006: 9).

Barker's portrayal of the families' reasoning behind Sharipova's actions (revenge, 'will of Allah') pivots around the opposition of rational/irrational. Sharipova, in this context, is depicted as irrational, not only on the basis of her gender, but also on the basis of her position as a non-Western woman. Via overlays of gendered and racialised or Orientalised processes agency is removed from the picture (Youngs 2006: 9-10). Barker (2010) concludes that it is unlikely that a clear answer will emerge with regards to Sharipova's motivation for the attack. This leaves open the question as to whether Sharipova was forced against her will to carry out the attack or whether she was, as investigators claim, a 'Black Widow'. Here the overlay of Sharipova's identity as non-Western, as 'Other', in conjunction with her feminine identity interact to reinforce stereotypes. Highlighting the ways in which Orientalist framing is threaded through these narratives and the ways in which this intersects with gender illustrates that agency is not only silenced through gendered but also through Orientalist stereotypes.

The exertion of agency, by these women, is further silenced through the infantilisation of their actions. Considering examples in which the actions of women suicide bombers are infantilised or rendered child-like, illustrate the workings of both gendered and Orientalist framing. Infantilisation, for Nayak, is a key feature of contemporary, post 9/11 Orientalist discourse. The historical origins of infantilisation in regards to Orientalist discourse are traced back by Nayak to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century where US policy makers documented that further imperial expansion was based on the need to save "emotional, irrational, irresponsible, unbusinesslike, unstable, childlike people" (Rosenberg 1991: 31–5, in Nayak, 2006: 48). Expanding on this, Nayak (2006: 48) defines infantilisation as the representation of certain political actors/communities as vulnerable, helpless and backward

children. This aspect of Orientalism is evident in Luke Harding's article which featured in *The Guardian* on April 4 2010, titled "Moscow suicide bombings: how the internet has changed the face of terrorism". Employing Nayak's concept of infantilisation in relation to Harding's report is telling of the double imprint of gendered and Orientalist stereotypes. Harding's description of Dzhennet, the second woman involved in the metro bombings, follows this Orientalist trope of infantilisation. Harding describes Dzhennet's 'porcelain features', 'doll-like face' and continues to state that she, seems "*almost too gamine* to be a genuine terrorist" (Harding 2010; emphasis added). This extract requires some close inspection. Harding's reference to Dzhennet's 'doll-like face', certainly relates to Nayak's conceptualization of infantilisation. Alluding to her face as 'doll-like' suggests she is vulnerable, helpless, and childlike. The connotations associated with the adjective 'gamine' also further infantilise this representation of Dzhennet. Gamine, to borrow from the Etymology Dictionary means: small, slim, pert young girl, from French feminine form of gamin (Etymology Dictionary 2010). Harding in this excerpt emphasises her femininity and simultaneously infantilises her actions. Harding's portrayal of Dzhennet relies on both Orientalist and gendered stereotypes, which renders her as childlike and helpless, denying her any sense of agency. By framing Dzhennet's actions through Orientalist frames, her agency is erased to the extent that Harding questions her genuineness doubting on the basis of her childlike appearance her ability to be a terrorist. Harding's article, is illustrative of the double working of both gendered and Orientalist framing, highlighting the ways in which infantilised or childlike representations serve to silence agency.

A third example where gendered stereotypes intersect with 'Orientalised' stereotypes is evident in Elder's article "Moscow bombings blamed on Chechnya's Black Widows". Elder's article appeared in *The Guardian´s* online version on March 28 2010 and comments on the origins of the 'Black Widows'. She writes:

They gained notoriety when images of Chechen women dressed in black chadors, their waists and chests adorned with bombs, flooded Russian television screens during the three-day Moscow theatre hostage crisis in October 2002 that left 129 people dead (Elder 2010).

Elder, in her article, connects the suspects of the metro attacks to the women (and men) involved in the Dubravka theatre siege of 2002. The photo accompanying Elder's report is of a Chechen woman holding hostages at gunpoint during the siege. Similar to the other articles surveyed, Elder situates the actions of the women, through their 'Black Widow' identity, in direct connection to their male relatives. She describes the term 'Black Widow' as an ominous nickname that usually connotes the loss of a male relative, particularly a husband or brother (Elder 2010). Following West's analysis, Elder's depiction of the women involved in the metro attacks and the use of the term 'Black Widow' pivots around understandings of femininity and masculinity, namely that it distinguishes the women terrorists from their male counterparts through an invocation of the concept of family sacrifice (West 2005: 5). This representation frames the women's actions as stemming from personal, not political, reasons. Additionally, Elder's reference to black chadors, which also appears in photographic form in Harding's article, carries particular 'Orientalised' meanings and stems, according to Banner, from racist origins. Banner, like Nacos earlier, suggests the name 'Black Widow' was coined by the media, whilst hinting at the possibility that it might actually have been the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) (Banner 2006: 239). Banner suggests the concept of the 'Black Widow' probably stems from racist origins. She notes that although 'Black Widow' is a direct reference to the appearance of women in black chadors, it is likely to have originated from the idea of the 'black Arab' (Banner 2006: 239). There are clear inferences to gender in the 'Black Widow' identity but and expanding upon Banner's work, these inferences cannot be understood in isolation from race and ethnicity. Whilst the motivations of 'Black Widows' are framed in connection to their relationships with men, they are also framed in connection to their Muslim identity. The 'Black Widow' concept therefore relies not only on gendered stereotypes but is also constructed within Orientalist framing that draws upon the interactions between both gendered and racialised or ethnic stereotypes.

> 'Black Widow' distinguishes the women terrorists through the invocation of family sacrifice

Further, West notes that in the five reports she surveyed that discussed the actions of Chechen women terrorists; all used the term 'Black Widow' (2005: 7). In 2010, from thirteen articles relating specifically to the March 2010 Moscow metro attacks, seven used the term widow, but only two used the term 'Black Widow'. Perhaps this suggests the purchase of the term 'Black Widow' is losing its value. However, it would be short-sighted to argue that this indicates a dramatic shift in representations of Chechen women terrorists. Whilst my findings highlight that, in comparison to West's 2005 study, the term 'Black Widow' is notably used less. The depiction of these women as 'widows' still proves to be salient in this context. The impact of which serves to de-politicises their actions and frame women's actions in reference to their role in the private world of the family (West 2005: 12). *Aljazeera*, in comparison with the BBC and *The Guardian*, uses the term 'widow' significantly less, and in only one report, discussed above by Barker, refers to Black Widows. Instead of relying on the 'widow' identity, of the eight reports from *Aljazeera* considered here, the most common terms used are 'attackers' and 'female suicide bombers' (*Aljazeera Net*, 2010). Whilst further content analysis, to be compared with *Aljazeera's* coverage of previous terrorist attacks involving women terrorists, would be required to better understand to what extent this could be considered an 'alternative' or significant departure from the BBC's or *The Guardian's* coverage, perhaps provides some direction for a larger study. What is apparent is that representations of Chechen women terrorists rely upon both gendered and racialised or ethnic stereotypes, underpinned by the idea that women, in comparison to men, are naturally peaceful and non-violent. Instead of challenging these pervasive ideas, media representations do more to reify these stereotypes. This speaks to Struckman's observation that the media's acceptance of men's agency in violence and the questioning of women's only naturalises these representations (2006: 315). Violent women are thus in need of explanation, which perhaps suggests why they receive significantly more media coverage than violent men (Bloom 2007: 100).

CONCLUSION

This essay has considered why female terrorists still continue to be perceived as an exception to the norm in need of explanation, an explanation rooted in the personal, familial domestic space and why these perceptions have proven to be so pervasive. Considering feminist IR analyses of Chechen women terrorists illustrates the necessity of these analyses, given the discipline of IR is deeply imbued by gendered identities, metaphors and constructions. What feminist-informed scholarship highlights is that the actions of Chechen women terrorists are understood in relation to prevailing feminine ideals, therefore any sense of their political agency is erased and their actions, albeit violent, destructive and political, are rendered as understandable only in connection to their relationships with men. As West suggests, these representations refer to a common gendered frame that de-politicises their actions and posits them as part of their role in the private world of the family (2005: 12). Building on this I have explained the ways in which approaches informed by post-colonial theory reveal the ways in which gender interacts with race and ethnicity, which acts to represent Chechen women terrorists as doubly imprinted by gendered and Orientalist stereotypes. Whilst it is important to consider this framing in relation to social constructions of femininity and masculinity, these constructions should not be divorced from the ways in which they intersect with race and ethnicity. In this aspect, Said's work, and the ways in which feminist scholars such as Nayak and Youngs use Said's concept of Orientalism, is particularly telling. For both feminist and post-colonial scholars agency is a central concern, by revealing the ways in which the agency of women are removed via overlays of gendered and racialised processes (Youngs 2006: 9-10), they seek to investigate the ways in which power asymmetries are produced, reinforced and sustained. Situations of conflict and political violence are, sadly, sites for which these asymmetries are pervasive and damaging. For Youngs (2006: 9) "...international politics, especially in conflict situations, is largely framed as enacted for women rather than by women'. Juxtaposing the ways in which feminist theory and post-colonial theory engage with problems of representation in relation to media coverage of Chechen women

terrorists, is a way to address this unbalanced view. Kemoklidze highlights that the myth of non-violent women, or nonexistence of female actors during wartime distorts our understanding of violence and the complexities that accompany it (2009: 187). Critical engagement with representations of violent women within the discipline of IR should attempt to engage with these myths and representations. Post-colonial scholarship in this regard offers a useful lens for which to deconstruct and question the pervasiveness of these representations and the ways in which gender, race and ethnicity interact in narratives and discourses of global politics and power relations.

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