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**Perception of women in terrorist organizations: comparative
study of the Islamic state and Al Qaeda**

Master's thesis

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Declaration of Authorship

1. I hereby declare that I compiled this thesis independently, using only listed resources and literature.
2. I hereby declare that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.
3. I agree that this work might be published for research and study purposes.

In Prague, January 4, 2019

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Abstract

The thesis aims to analyze the role of women in the Islamic State and Al Qaeda and determine which factors can account for the differences in their perception of women. Although the phenomenon of terrorism has been the focus of many researchers in the field of international relations, the amount of attention paid to women as perpetrators of terrorist violence is significantly smaller. Both of the studied terrorist organizations follow the radical interpretation of Islam which results in many shared views concerning female roles in society in general and in jihad in particular. However, it is possible to find differences in their opinions of women, especially in relation to a more active involvement in the groups' combat and martyrdom operations. In regards to methodology, comparative case study was chosen as the best possible method to explain these differences. The results of the analysis show that it is the worsening security context and increasing threats to the group's survival that are able to account for the acceptance of female combatants in the case of the Islamic State. On the other hand, Al Qaeda's relatively strong position does not create similar pressure for the group to change its position regarding women.

Keywords

Terrorism, Role of Women, Islamic State, Al Qaeda

Range of thesis: 61 pages, 23 044 words, 144 264 characters

Abstrakt

Cílem této magisterské práce je prozkoumat roli žen v Islámském státě a Al-Káidě a určit, které okolnosti jsou schopny vysvětlit rozdíly v jejich vnímání žen. I když se terorismus stal předmětem zkoumání mnoha vědců z oblasti mezinárodních vztahů, množství pozornosti věnované ženám jakožto pachatelkám teroristického násilí je výrazně menší. Obě studované teroristické organizace sdílejí radikální interpretaci Islámu, a to vede k tomu, že se shodují v mnoha názorech ohledně postavení žen, ať už ve společnosti obecně nebo přímo v jejich působení v džihádu. Na druhou stranu si je možné všimnout určitých rozdílů, zvláště co se týká aktivnějšího působení žen v bojových nebo sebevražedných operacích. Pokud jde o metodologii, komparativní případová studie byla vybrána jako nejlepší možná metoda k vysvětlení těchto rozdílů. Výsledná analýza ukázala, že rozhodujícím faktorem ovlivňujícím přijetí žen v bojových rolích v případě Islámského státu je zhoršující se bezpečnostní kontext, který ohrožuje přežití teroristické organizace. Na druhou stranu, relativně silná bezpečnostní pozice Al-Káidy nenutí teroristickou organizaci ke změně postojů ohledně žen.

Klíčová slova

Terorismus, role žen, Islámský stát, Al-Káida

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Introduction

Terrorism is in the contemporary world considered to be one of the most serious threats to international security. Terrorist attacks have the potential to injure and possibly kill a great number of people, create chaos and disrupt global peace and stability. That is why the subject of terrorism has been a focus of the scholars and policy makers as well as the media. Many researchers have been attempting to understand this extensive and complex phenomenon. Countless studies and academic articles have been dedicated to specific terrorist organizations, their recruitment strategies, the motivations people have to commit such atrocious acts of violence and many other aspects of this topic in order to get a better sense of how the terrorist groups work so it would be possible to develop successful counterterrorism strategies that would help stop or even prevent further acts of violence.

However, most of the attention focused on terrorism has not considered the role women play in terrorist organizations. It is generally assumed that the perpetrator of terrorist violence is a man while women are usually situated in the role of victims. This stereotypical representation of gender roles, however, does not allow for an accurate portrayal of reality. Women can take on diverse roles within the organization, from the more supportive to positions of authority and even leadership. Even though it is true that women are mostly a minority in terrorist organizations, it would be wrong to disregard their contribution to help fulfill the group's goal and overall survival.

For the topic of my master's thesis, I have chosen to focus on this more feminist perspective of terrorism and contribute to the existing academic literature stressing the role of women in terrorism. I intend to conduct a comparative study of female roles in two specific terrorist organizations – Al Qaeda and the Islamic State - that have gained notoriety due to their violent actions and hatred of the West, building on the already existing knowledge about women in these organizations and female terrorism in general. Both of these terrorist organizations share the radical interpretation of Islam; however, their perception of female roles is different. I will attempt to determine what these differences can be attributed to. I hypothesize that the reasons for these differences are more practical than ideological or theological in nature. More specifically I argue that the ideological shift towards the acceptance of a more active female involvement in the organization is caused by the stricter security situation and anti-terrorism measures that eventually create an operational necessity,

forcing the terrorist groups to rely on their female members even in combat and martyrdom operations, as was the case with Al Qaeda in Iraq when the leadership decided to use female suicide bombers in response to the threat the organization was facing from its opposition forces. In this sense, the tactic of employing women as suicide attackers was seen as a sort of last resort while also offering the group tactical and strategic advantages that are related to the use of female suicide bombers in general. Therefore, I will attempt to analyze if the case of AQI was only an exception or if the same could apply in the aforementioned terrorist groups should they face similar circumstances. The thesis should provide an explanation as to why and in what capacity terrorist groups use women to pursue their goals in order to consider the topic of female terrorists appropriately when analyzing the issue of terrorism.

1. Theoretical background – women in terrorism

Historically women have been affiliated with terrorism since its inception, even though in most cases their numbers, compared to the male members of the group, have been smaller. However, it is only in recent decades that a more significant attention is being paid to female involvement in terrorist groups both by scholars and by the general public. Even so, the stereotypical representations of women in terrorism still prevail; they are often seen as passive, only playing support roles in the organizations. In reality, as Cunningham (2003, p.157) stated “women have been operational in virtually every region and there are clear trends toward women becoming more fully incorporated into numerous terrorist organizations”.

The first part of the thesis will be focused on the general female participation in terrorist groups. First as it evolved throughout the history of terrorism (more specifically in Rapoport’s representation of four different waves of terrorism each characterized by a different prevailing type of a terrorist group); the motivations for terrorist violence will also be mentioned as well as the roles women have been evidenced to play in terrorist organizations.

1.1. History

While studying the history of terrorism, David Rapoport distinguished four distinct waves of terrorism. The first wave was centered on revolutionary anarchist groups in the late 19th and early 20th century. Narodnaya Volya (People’s will) is commonly recognized as the first modern terrorist organization, emerging in czarist Russia with the goal to bring a new democratic regime by assassinating the key leaders. In 1881, its terrorist campaign reached its peak with the assassination of Czar Alexander II. Contrary to popular stereotypes, women in this group played important roles, some even being a part of the leadership, planning and carrying out the attacks¹. (Weinberg, Eubank, 2011, p.23-24) The number of female members was also quite high (more than a quarter), probably due to its focus on not only economic, but

¹ Not only were women among the first to join Narodnaya Volya, the first person brought to court for terrorism charges was one of its female members, Vera Zasulich, in 1878. She was eventually found not guilty of the attempted assassination of the Governor of St.Petersburg; instead becoming more of a heroine to the people. It is also interesting to note that during the trial she continuously maintained she was not a killer, rather proclaimed that: I am a terrorist. (Bloom, 2017, p.1-2)

also gender equality. The political platform of Narodnaya Volya specifically addressed women's political rights. (Bloom, 2011, p.2)

Although ultimately unsuccessful in its endeavor, Narodnaya Volya served as an inspiration for many other groups² in Europe. For example, in 1901, Socialist Revolutionary Party emerged also in Russia, the group used terrorist tactics in order to achieve its goal of creating a worker's republic in Russia. Women were also members of this organization, however, it should be noted that they generally came from a lower social class, which is a significant difference from the women participating in Narodnaya Volya who were usually middle class. (Weinberg, Eubank, 2011, p.24-25)

The second wave of terrorism (1920-1960) was dominated by the terrorist groups that wished to achieve national independence. That was the case in Algeria or Palestine, in some way also in Kenya. However, the role of women within these terrorist campaigns has been limited. For example, Muslim women (mostly young, educated, middle class) were recruited by the National Liberation Front, which was leading the struggle for Algerian independence, to execute number of terrorist operations. However, their participation in the terrorist campaign did not secure benefits (such as gender equality) to Muslim women in general. (Weinberg, Eubank, 2011, p.26-27)

In comparison, women performed much more significant roles in the third wave which was characterized by terrorist groups with revolutionary ideals. It was in this time that Leila Khaled, young Palestinian member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, was among a group that skyjacked an airplane (September 1970) which turned her into a heroine for many men and women in the Arab world and basically a symbol of Palestinian resistance. Around the same time, Italy experienced its most significant rise in left-wing terrorism, represented above all by the Red Brigades and Front Line. In both groups, an important number of women enjoyed leadership positions, they helped plan and execute numerous attacks carried out by the organizations.³ (Weinberg, Eubank, 2011, p. 28) This shows a

² It was not only other groups that were inspired to use terrorist strategies to achieve their goals. So called 'lone wolfs', who were not directly affiliated with anarchist circles, carried out (or at least attempted to) assassinations. The most well-known woman associated with the rise of anarchist violence was Emma Goldman; she wrote books and articles in support of the anarchist cause as well as several other topics that would be considered feminist today (e.g. birth control) and, along with her partner, planned to also carry out an assassination. (Weinberg, Eubank, 2011 p.25)

³ Similarly, in West Germany, one of its best known terrorist organizations – the Red Army Faction (also known as the Baader-Meinhoff Gang) had a significant number of female members, most notably Ulrike Meinhoff and Gudrun Ensslin, who took part in the group's creation. (Weinberg, Eubank, 2011, p.29)

general trend that leftist organizations⁴ generally attract more female supporters and recruits as their strive for political and social change is appealing to women; moreover their ideology also influences the group's organizational structures leaving women to be over-represented in the leadership positions compared to the sparse numbers of female leaders in right wing groups. (Cunningham, 2003, p.157)

The final wave is heavily influenced by religious factors. Also, the use of suicide bombings with the aim to kill as many people as possible on an indiscriminate basis appears with much higher frequency than ever before. In this context, women have several advantages in carrying out such attacks as they are generally seen as not threatening and can hide bombs under their clothing more successfully (even giving the impression of being pregnant). Most notably, women have been deployed as suicide bombers on behalf of, among others, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka; Chechen separatists; the Kurdish People's Party or in the context of the Palestinian conflict. However, most female suicide bombings have been committed on the behalf of secular or largely secular causes. (Weinberg, Eubank, 2011, p.34-35) The topic of women as suicide bombers will be analyzed further in the final section of this chapter.

1.2. Motivations

Attempts to understand why people (regardless of gender) participate in terrorism often focus on series of factors that makes them especially vulnerable to the recruitment from the terrorist organizations. For example, they are often hypothesized to be young, uneducated, unemployed, disconnected from society; familial and peer connections are also explored as risk factors. Jacques and Taylor analyzed these factors specifically for female terrorists (as the subject of specifically female motivations is quite understudied and often resorts to stereotypes); the studied sample also included male terrorists who served as a comparison group. They concluded that the terrorists are in fact young (which applies to both males and females), however, contrary to the stereotypes, they were often well educated, majority completing secondary and even tertiary education; similarly, the employment rate in their studied sample was high (the only exception being the conflicts in Chechnya and Iraq). As for

⁴ Not only in Europe, same can be seen in organizations in Latin America, like the FARC in Colombia or the Shining Path in Peru, where women held important positions. (Cunningham, 2003, p.159) However, in other parts of the world, women still mostly fulfilled supporting roles and helped the male leaders and combatants. Significant change occurred in recent years with the rise of female suicide bombers whose numbers are rapidly increasing. (Lavina, 2015, p.245)

the terrorist's social status, while women were more likely to be divorced or widowed (this difference was even more pronounced in the Chechen conflict), no significant difference was otherwise found between the genders; both male and female terrorists were as likely to be single as they were to be married. Greater gender difference was found when studying the immigrant status; while only a small percentage of female terrorists appeared to be immigrants, the number was significantly higher among their male counterparts. The results also suggested that religious conversion was not a significant factor. Moreover, the study found little evidence to show a link between criminal activity and terrorism. Lastly, the analysis revealed that, while some of the terrorists had connections to terrorist groups through their family members, not all considered it to be a motivating factor. (Jacques, Taylor, 2013, p. 36-41)

Determining specific reasons that motivate women to join terrorist organizations is difficult; one of the main problems is the lack of available data or possibilities for primary research stemming simply from the inherent difficulties when studying terrorism. The stereotypes surrounding women, and female terrorists in particular, also complicate the matter. Yesevi (2014, p.581) mentions a so called "beautiful soul" narrative, the assumption that women are more peaceful, whereas men have stronger connection with violence. Even when women are partaking in the occurring violence (as fighters or soldiers), they are considered more vulnerable, weaker and expected to assume their roles as mothers once the conflict is over. "Generally, women and motherhood have been using as synonymous," (Yesevi, 2014, p.581)

Even scholars analyzing the subject of motivations for terrorism seem to be sometimes biased. To that end, Bloom (2011, p.8) pointed out that "an influential body of research on this topic has alleged that women are motivated by emotions while male terrorist operatives are inspired by religion, nationalism, or the desire to combat an occupation⁵."

⁵ Further analysis led Bloom (2011, p.9-10) to identify that the main difference between male and female terrorists is not so much their motivations (as evidence suggests both groups experience political and personal reasons for joining terrorist organizations) as the way they are mobilized. Societal norms (especially in more traditional, patriarchal societies) often relegate women to familial roles at home, not allowing them the same opportunities as the men. Rather than distinct motives, it is "the same series of motivations and experiences that occur at different times during the course of their lives" (Bloom, 2011, p. 10) O'Rourke (2009, p.701), on the other hand, identified the main motivational factor (regardless of gender) to be the terrorist's loyalty to the community. However, the difference between male and female perpetrators is found in the way they are recruited by the terrorist groups. Those recruitment strategies aimed specifically at women focus on, among others, revenge, religion, a chance of redemption for violating gender societal norms, nationalism or feminist calls for equal participation.

Different scholars identified several factors that could contribute to the reasons why women join terrorist organizations. Yesevi (2014, p. 588-600) found a number of psychological and sociological factors related to female terrorism. For example, the appeal for equal treatment has been one of the main themes connected to female terrorism (however, given the masculine nature of terrorism, the situation often led only to furthering female subordination⁶). Group solidarity and shared ideological commitment are also emphasized as significant motivations (more so than personal attributes). Supporting and even participating in terrorism can be seen by many women as a way to protect their families and communities. Among personal characteristics, redemption, respect, revenge and relationship are the most important factors that motivate female terrorists.

Similarly, Bloom (2011, p.11-17) outlined the female motivations as the ‘four R’s’ - Revenge, Redemption, Relationship and Respect. It is important to mention that the categories are not mutually exclusive. Revenge for the loved ones that were killed is one of the most mentioned reasons for women’s participation. The possibility of redemption is mostly related to suicide operations, where women willingly become martyrs to redeem themselves for the past crimes against gender norms. The third R – relationship, often serves as an introduction to the terrorist group. Familial ties among the group can create a cohesive network; here women may serve as important links that keep the men committed to the organization. Vice versa, such marriages can, on the other hand, permit the organization to compel the wife to become a terrorist and commit violence herself. Finally, becoming a part of the terrorist organization (and especially taking on active roles and committing violent acts) shows that women have the same dedication to the cause as their male counterparts in the society, earning them respect of their community (while also giving them a sense of greater purpose). In the case of suicide bombers, they are often considered heroines, role models that should be imitated. Moreover, in Islam, martyrs are rewarded for their sacrifice after their deaths. Women are promised to earn a place beside Allah in heaven along with 70 closest relatives. They are said to become more beautiful and rewarded with a perfect husband. In the end, Bloom adds one final R for rape since there have been instances of women being deliberately targeted and sexually assaulted with the sole purpose of forcing them to join a terrorist organization as they are often considered ruined in the eyes of the traditional communities. Conversely, when

⁶ Other authors also pointed out that even though women participate in terrorism, they are often forced to occupy the same traditional roles. Furthermore, there is “little evidence to support the proposition that women’s participation in terrorist groups helped improve gender equality and social justice within their group or in broader society.” (Dalton, Asal, 2011, p.804)

women are raped by whoever the community considers to be an enemy, the terrorist organizations do not hesitate to use such cases for propaganda value to mobilize both men and women. “Any abuse of the population’s women by the other side is likely to emerge as a mechanism for radicalization and mobilization into the terrorist movement as well as increasing the number of women who volunteer or are forced to join when they realize that they have little left to lose.” (Bloom, 2011, p.17)

However, despite there being no evidence of fundamental differences between male and female terrorists when it comes to their ideological commitments, brutality, motivation or recruitment, there continue to be social gender stereotypes in regards to the subject. A sort of disconnect can be found between the media representation of women in terrorism and their actual reality. For example, Nacos (2005, p.436, 438-445) studied how female terrorists are depicted in the mass media and found several repeating framing patterns⁷. Attention tends to be paid to their physical appearance, familial background or their partner (quite common is the assumption that women are motivated to commit violence by the man they love, even more so to avenge his death). In some cases, their actions are explained as an expression of gender equality (especially in culturally traditional countries). Furthermore, women terrorists are seen as even more fanatical, deadlier than men (the idea that they are not “real” women is expressed quite often), at the same time, also quite common is the concept that these women are naïve, bored or have issues in socialization.

Similarly there is also the so called “Mother, Monster, Whore” narrative where women who commit violent acts are placed in one of the three categories. The Mother category considers the expected role of women (from another angle, not being able to fulfill such a role might drive a woman to terrorism). The Monster category creates an assumption that there is something innately wrong with the woman to be able to explain her actions. The women from the last category, on the other hand, use their sexuality to manipulate men. Such categorization, however, denies women responsibility for their actions; it “reflects a desire to explain away the existence and active political agency of women in terrorist organizations.” (Cruise, 2016 p.38-39)

⁷ Interestingly, Nacos compared the media representations of female terrorists to those of female politicians and found the same gender frames are used in both groups (with the exception of the “bored, naïve” frame). Even though in politics, the stereotypical reporting seems to have weakened in the last decades, the gender frames are more prevalent in the terrorism case allowing the terrorist groups to take advantage of these prejudices. (Nacos, 2005, 437, 447-448)

While analyzing the motivations women have for becoming terrorists is important, it is also interesting to examine the topic from the point of view of the terrorist organizations. One could ask - why do terrorist groups increasingly employ more female terrorists? Throughout history, while it is true that women held positions within different terrorist groups, sometimes even at the highest places within the organization's leadership, the overwhelming majority of members were still male; women acting as operatives and conducting acts of violence were more of an exception than the rule.

Generally, women's most important role was to birth and take care of the men, making sure they would be sympathetic to the terrorist cause; basically creating the next generation of terrorists should the conflict last a long time. However, in the last several decades, terrorist organizations⁸ started to see women as useful beyond procreation. To counteract anti-terrorism efforts, terrorist groups had to find different ways and methods to remain effective. Using women as operatives seemed to be a logical step in this context. Women are better at remaining undetected; they often have easier times bypassing checkpoints and hiding weapons under their clothing. By using women, the organizations also get access to previously unnoticed potential in the form of new recruits, which becomes more pronounced with the lowering numbers of male members due to the effectiveness of counterterrorism strategies. The idea of female terrorists somehow incites even more panic and fear than is the case with the regular terrorist attacks. The overreaction from governments often leads to anger within the population and creates mobilizing potential for the group. Women also attract more media attention (up to eight times more than men) which allows the group to spread its ideology more effectively and address more potential members. In other words, female terrorists "are a highly effective tool for promoting the group's agenda, recruitment and completing missions." (Lavina, 2015, p.250-251)

Dalton and Asal (2011, p.805) identified four types of benefits women's involvement can bring. First, they can occupy support roles and apply their skills in care giving. There is also the previously mentioned strategic advantage that comes with general perception of peacefulness and pacifism people often attribute to women. Third benefit is related to martyrdom and the symbolic value women as suicide terrorist represent. Lastly, women can

⁸ Here, it is important to take into account the different types of terrorist organizations. Female terrorists were far more likely to be members of secular and leftist terrorist groups than religious or rightist ones. The strategic evolution of the view of women as operatives is the most pronounced in fundamentalist Islamic groups. In this context, there is a visible change during the past two decades from clerical opposition to female involvement in terrorist violence, to indifference, and in some cases even to the recent endorsement of women suicide bombers. (Dalton, Asal, 2011, p.807)

benefit the group through reproduction as well as provide physical and emotional solace to the male members.

Furthermore, their analysis of female participation in terrorism, while complimenting some of the previous research (e.g. positive relationship between the achievement of higher education and the support and participation in terrorism), revealed some new facts concerning the influence the organizational structure of the group has on the acceptance of female members⁹. Somewhat logically, larger groups are more likely to use women in terrorist attacks. More interestingly, the age of the terrorist organization seems to have the largest impact on female involvement. That can be interpreted as a tactical evolution on the side of the organization; on the other hand, it can also stem from the fact that prolonged conflicts simply create more mobilizing opportunities for both men and women. Also, the older the organization, the better developed is its network; in this sense women can become a part of the group through their families or friends since it is more likely that they already have a connection to terrorism. Additionally, men are considered more suspect; security officers tend to be more vigilant and often develop preventive counterterrorism measures that foil many attempts of terrorist attacks conducted by men forcing the organizations to deploy female terrorists since they receive less scrutiny and are more likely to succeed. Women's participation can also serve to legitimize the group's cause. (Dalton, Asal, 2011, p.809-816)

1.3. Roles

The last part of this chapter will be focused on the roles women take up in the terrorist organizations. There has been evidence of women on many different positions in different terrorist groups throughout the history. Cragin and Daly (2009) managed to identify five general roles divided into several subcategories that women played in terrorist organizations around the world.

First, and the most common, is the role of logisticians that involves three basic tasks – couriers, protectors and decoys. This role tends to be considered less dangerous and therefore

⁹ The study also showed a positive relationship between economic development and the possibility women will participate in terrorist violence. In third world and culturally traditional countries, this may be linked to women's receding share of the labor market. Their involvement in terrorism might therefore arise from the desperation over grim economic and social prospects. In the developed countries, on the other hand, the development is related to more opportunities in education, labor market and the public sphere in general. In this case, the female participation in terrorism is more connected with ideological or religious reasons. (Dalton, Asal, 2011, p.814-816)

the most appropriate for women (however, in reality counterterrorism efforts are often focused on support networks and regularly target logisticians). As couriers, women may smuggle money, weapons or messages and sometimes even build bombs and smuggle firearms away after an attack, thus helping to lower the possibility of arrest for the attacker. The fact, that women are considered less suspicious, increases the likelihood of a successful mission. Some of the women that started out as couriers have later been “promoted” to be operatives or commanders of logistical networks. On the other hand, the task of a protector is not an official role within the group. They can provide safe houses or alleviate the effectiveness of antiterrorism measures; in the case of Al Qaeda, the protection is given through marriage when the operatives are asked to marry women from local tribes to secure their loyalty and support. Lastly, as decoys, women take advantage of the gender stereotypes and distract security officers, sometimes even luring them to danger. Furthermore, women can join the operatives on their missions since couples also arouse less suspicion than single men. (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.21-34)

Next is the role of a recruiter which the authors divided into three subcategories – facilitator, propagandist and historical conscience. The facilitator role represents a more direct, face-to-face recruitment. They do not only use positive relationship to entice new members to join, sometimes also coercive measures are used. However, the use of women as facilitators is relatively uncommon, often built on kinship ties. Propagandists, on the other hand, try to reach greater number of potential members through, for example, the internet or the distribution of pamphlets; they do not usually meet the recruits directly. Lastly, even less directly, women may serve as a historical conscience for their communities adding to a general feeling of sympathy and support and laying foundation for potential members to believe in the groups cause. (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.41-50)

Third, there is the role of women as operational leaders and fighters. While quite rare, some terrorist organizations have been known to allow women to take on operational roles. Women were more likely to play such roles in left wing groups, such as the Baader-Meinhof Gang in Germany or the Provisional Irish Republican Army. However, contradictory evidence shows that women became operational leaders even in more culturally traditional terrorist organizations, like the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), LTTE or in the Palestinian terrorist groups. (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.73-74)

Furthermore, Cragin and Daly also identified the role of women as the so called “political vanguards”. Even though it is rare, women in such leadership positions have appeared in a number of terrorist organizations, for example, in the Shining Path in Peru, PKK in Turkey, Real Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, Zapatista Revolutionary Army in Mexico, ETA in Spain, Hizballah in Lebanon or the Japanese Red Army. This role can likewise be divided into three categories. First, there are strategic visionaries who represent ideological or strategic leaders of the group, they provide direction for the group, they can take part in militant activities but it is not always the case. Second, there are central committee members who participate in the decision-making bodies of the terrorist group concerning, for example, the military operations but also activities of charitable nature or issues related to women’s rights. Third, there is the role of political officials elected in civilian legislatures after the organization managed to accomplish legitimacy through either military success or negotiations with the central government. (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.85-88)

Finally, the last identified role women can have is that of a suicide bomber. A significant part of the academic literature concerning the topic of female involvement in terrorist groups has been focused on female suicide bombers as greater attention has been paid to this phenomenon in the last two decades. The first female suicide bombing has occurred in 1985 in Lebanon on behalf of the secular Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP/PPS) when Sana Mekhaidali successfully targeted an Israeli convoy causing the death of five soldiers. (Raghavan, Balasubramaniyan, 2014, p.200) Since then, a significant trend has been observed of an increasing female involvement in suicide operations.

At first, it was mainly the ethno-nationalist separatist groups that employed women as suicide bombers, however, recently (especially after 2000) conservative religious movements have begun to use them as well¹⁰. There has also been a spike in the number of unclaimed female suicide attacks. The evidence has shown that women are more lethal as suicide attackers than

¹⁰ The majority of attacks conducted by female terrorist were executed on behalf of secular organizations. Among the strictly secular groups, all of them have been evidenced to use female suicide bombers. The most known organizations in this case are, for example, the LTTE in Sri Lanka, PKK in Turkey, Chechen separatists and the Al-Aqsa Martyr’s Brigades in Palestine. The leaders framed the participation in suicide attacks as a way to demonstrate women’s dedication to the cause and encouraged women to participate early on in their suicide campaigns. The religious terrorist organizations, however, mostly discouraged female suicide attacks for a long time; relegating women to mainly support roles within the organizations. The change came after the successful use of female bombers by secular groups involved in the same conflict, which more or less forced the organizations to adopt similar tactics to remain a relevant party to a conflict. However, established gender roles still continue to be emphasized by the religious groups, contrary to secular ones. First of the religious groups to be responsible for female suicide bombing was Hamas in 2004 after the suicide attack of Wafa Idris in 2002 on the behalf of the Al-Asqa Martyrs Brigade received an overwhelmingly positive response from the Muslim population not only in Palestine. (O’Rourke, 2009, p.693-697)

their male counterparts. (Davis, 2013, p.281-282) O'Rourke (2009, p.687-690) analyzed the effectiveness of female suicide terrorism and concluded that such attacks claim more casualties (both on individual and team levels); furthermore, the effectiveness remains even in the face of increased counterterrorism measures often developed by the states. Women arouse less suspicion and therefore are often subjected to less strict security measures (this is even more pronounced in traditional societies where invasive physical searches tend to be considered as a threat to women's honor). They are also better equipped to hide explosive under their clothes, even giving the impression of a pregnancy when smuggling larger devices.

The psychological impact female suicide bombers generate should also not be underestimated. When women are involved in suicide operations, the media attention such attacks generate is greater than in the case of male bombers. The media coverage works to instill fear within the population, but also to increase sympathy and support for the organization and can act as a mobilizing factor to recruit more members. In places, where several terrorist groups fight for the same cause, is this especially significant factor as it allows the organization to differentiate itself from others. (Raghavan, Balasubramanian, 2014, p.203)

Davis (2013, p.283-284) studied the factors that could account for the use of female suicide bombers on the group level. Among the most significant is the pressure from limited recruitment opportunities (usually present in long-lasting conflicts¹¹ as was the case for LTTE in Sri Lanka or PKK in Turkey). There are other strategic reasons to include women in terrorist operations, like their ability to more easily avoid detection and target high-profile targets, greater media attention (which allows the group to broadcast the seriousness of the its commitment to the cause) related to the use of female suicide terrorism to recruit men, radicalize them and even shame them into joining.

Following up on the research conducted by Cragin and Daly, Vogel, Porter and Keibell (2014, p.99-102) studied 482 cases of women involved in contemporary political conflicts around the world representing a number of causes¹². The results in this case show four distinct

¹¹ It was discovered that "on average, terrorist groups that use suicide terrorism as a tactic wait 13.5 years before employing women." This finding coincides with the analysis by Dalton and Asal mentioned in the previous chapter which emphasized the age of the terrorist group as a significant indicator of the women's participation in the terrorist group. (Davis, 2013, p.284)

¹² Cragin and Daly's analysis was compared with a typology of Mahan and Griset that classified the roles women usually take up in terrorist groups into four categories. Sympathizer represents traditional feminine tasks

themes – caring, support, active, ideological – demonstrating four broad conceptual roles that symbolize the simultaneous occurrence of specific activities within the theme.

The active theme consists of a combination of leadership and fighting abilities (such as strategy, motivation, ideology, but also murder, kidnapping and fighting). There appeared to be also activities that are not usually considered to be related with leadership or fighting positions, including administrative tasks, logistical support and gathering resources. The active theme is indicative of the woman's high level of incorporation into the organization combined with a great degree of trust given to her. Finally, marrying a male member of the group has also been an observable characteristic within the active theme supporting the assumption that women often take part in terrorist violence as a result of their personal relationships, however, the analysis did not differentiate between the relationships that were created before the individual joined the terrorist organization. (Vogel, Porter, Keibell, 2014, p.102-103)

The ideological theme includes activities connected with propaganda and recruitment but also fundraising and representing the organization to the population (for example in the form of political official). Quite surprisingly the theme contained the variables of hijacking and hostage taking as well as suicide bombing. For this, the authors offer an explanation that such acts are often committed with the specific intention of publicizing the organization or its ideology. (Vogel, Porter, Keibell, 2014, p.103-104)

The support theme coincides in many ways with Cragin and Daly's logistician role. Variables like courier, smuggler, decoy or intelligence gatherer show up with the most frequency. It also supports the assumption that women are often used due to the prevailing social stereotypes that allow them to bypass security more easily or deceive security officials. Finally, the caring theme comprises of stereotypically feminine tasks like household chores and nursing. In regards to guerilla warfare, managing the camp is also a task incorporated here. Like in the active theme, the marriage to a group member is mentioned as well. (Vogel, Porter, Keibell, 2014, p.104)

Even though the previously mentioned typologies differ in certain aspects, certain similar patterns can be observed. Moreover, it is clearly shown that women have been involved in

like cooking and providing shelter. Spy displays higher involvement with the group encompassing activities like intelligence gathering and playing decoy or a messenger. The third category, warrior, contains active combat duties. Last, there is the category of "dominant force" representing leadership positions within the group. (Vogel, Porter, Keibell, 2014, p. 94-95)

terrorist organizations in numerous ways, not only in traditional support roles but also taking up leadership positions and participating in terrorist attacks. The following section of the thesis will briefly focus on the methodology used in this text before analyzing the female involvement in specific terrorist organizations – al Qaeda and the Islamic state.

2. Methodology

The first chapter introduced the academic knowledge available regarding female involvement in terrorism. However, before moving on to a deeper analysis of Al Qaeda and the Islamic state, which constitutes the main topic of this thesis, it is important to also mention in more detail the methodological background the thesis will draw upon. That will represent the focus of this chapter.

While quantitative methods can often be used by researchers in political science to contribute to the existing knowledge in the subject, for the purpose of this thesis, qualitative approaches seem more suitable; more specifically in this case – a comparative case study. As the name suggests, the researchers examine two or more cases in depth and subsequently perform across-case analysis between them. Comparison as a more general method can be made even in a one-case study; comparative study however evaluates the observations in at least two different cases¹³. (Karlsson, 2008, p.62)

Using comparison of a limited number of cases as a part of research has a longstanding tradition in the field of political science. The selection of only a handful of cases is strongly related to the fact that many of the phenomena in this field of study are quite particular and they do not occur in large numbers. Furthermore, “some analysts believe that political phenomena in general are best understood through the careful examination of a small number of cases.” (Collier, 1993, p. 105) Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, when general practice for its use has been established, the comparative study has become one of the main qualitative methods in international relations and political science. Even so, there have been significant innovations made since then that helped further improve this method. (Karlsson, 2008, p.62)

Generally, comparative case study can be used for three main purposes. First, there is the parallel demonstration of theory where the researcher examines the empirical validity of the chosen theory. Second, the macro-causal analysis focuses on the variables in different cases with the hope of uncovering new relationships, which could possibly lead to formulating a new hypothesis. Lastly, the so-called contrast of contexts concentrates more on the cases

¹³ Here it should also be mentioned that some scholars do not differentiate between such distinctions. Bennett (2004, p.21) for example uses “the term case study methods to refer to both within-case analysis of single cases and comparisons among a small number of cases, as most case studies involve both kinds of analysis due to the limits of either method used alone. Even single-case studies usually draw implicit comparisons to wider groups of cases.”

themselves, the researcher in this case does not try to make new theories or generalizations, rather speaks to the validity of already known concepts by analyzing the specific conditions of the cases. (Karlas, 2008, p.65-67; Collier, 1993, p.108)

The formulation of new theories is usually the most emphasized factor in case studies. Seeing as “working outside of singular and overarching theoretical programs, comparative analysts are especially likely to begin their research without well-developed and readily testable hypotheses.” (Mahoney, 2007, p.124) Either by analyzing the deviant cases that do not conform to theoretical predictions, the adoption of highly contextualized comparisons or studying the temporal processes, new concepts can appear in the course of the case study. (Mahoney, 2007, p.124-126)

One of the greatest challenges in comparative case study is the case selection itself. There are several theoretical ways according to which the researcher can choose the most appropriate cases for the comparative study, mostly based on the goal the researcher hopes to achieve. The most notable way is to select most-similar or least-similar cases for comparison. This logic builds on Mill’s methods of agreement and difference which will be mentioned in greater detail later. In the case of most-similar cases, the researcher chooses such cases that differ in just one independent variable as well as in the outcome; then it is only a matter of demonstrating (with the use of process tracing) that it is the different independent variable which is able to account for the difference in outcomes and not other residual differences connected to rival hypotheses. The least-similar cases on the other hand share the same dependent variable and only one independent variable. In this instance the researcher must prove (through process tracing) that there exists a plausible causal path between the shared independent variable and the outcome. Another way of case selection is to pick the least-likely case, which, in simplest terms, is based on the logic that if the studied theory can apply here, it can apply anywhere. Bennett (2007, p.173) explains that “the more surprising an outcome is relative to extant theories, the more we increase our confidence in the theory or theories that are consistent with that outcome.” The combination of cross-case and over-time comparison, which allows the cases to be possibly compared in two distinct ways, is also an option. Lastly, as was already mentioned, the researcher can choose deviant cases that do not conform to prior theoretical expectations as a way to possibly uncover new relationships between variables and formulate new hypotheses. (Bennett, 2007, p.173-178)

After the cases for the analysis have been selected, it is also important to consider the specific methods which will be used to identify the relationships between the independent and dependent variables and the causal paths which lead to the outcomes in each case. First, there are the methods of analysis that are common in case studies in general, such as process tracing, congruence testing and counterfactual analysis. Process tracing analyzes if the intervening variables account for the outcome in a way that was predicted by the theoretical concepts that the researcher used. Congruence testing, which seems to be most relevant to this thesis, is used to determine if outcome that was predicted is congruent with the actual outcome. Lastly, counterfactual analysis reverses the generally used mode of inference; instead of asserting that a variable was necessary for a specific outcome, the counterfactual states that if the variable did not occur, the outcome would not have occurred either. (Bennett, 2004, p.22-26)

Furthermore, there are also specific methods available for comparative case studies. Generally, the most well-known are Mill's methods of elimination which include the already mentioned method of agreement and method of difference but also the method of concomitant variables. Mill's method of agreement compares at least two cases with shared dependent variables that differ in all but one independent variable. Such independent variable therefore must be the cause of the dependent variable. In the same logic, Mill's method of difference analyzes cases that share all but one independent variable but differ in dependent variables. Here, the one different independent variable causes the differences in dependent variables. Finally, Mill's method of concomitant variables compares the values of dependent and independent variables, this allows the researcher to categorize the variables based on their values. The independent variable, which shares the same value as the dependent variable in each case, can be characterized as the causal variable. (Karlas, 2008, p.70-71) However, especially in social sciences, in most circumstances it is quite difficult to achieve such conditions where the cases fulfill the requirements set forth by these methods¹⁴. Instead "qualitative methodologists have recast Mill's methods of agreement and difference as tools for eliminating potential necessary and sufficient causes."¹⁵ [...] The methods provide a basis

¹⁴ Even Mill himself expressed similar concerns when developing the methods; he claimed that "the methods of difference and of concomitant variations could not be applied in the social sciences because sufficiently similar cases could not be found." (Lijphart, 1971, p.688)

¹⁵ The method of agreement is quite useful in eliminating potential necessary causes while the method of difference can be used to remove possible sufficient causes. The deterministic nature of both methods works sufficiently to exclude different explanatory factors. (Mahoney, 2007, p. 134) For clarification purposes, necessary cause signifies that the existence of the dependent variable is conditional on the existence of the independent variable; the existence of the independent variable however does not necessarily lead to the

for systematically eliminating rival hypotheses when only a small number of cases are selected.” (Mahoney, 2007, p. 134)

There are also more modern methods that can be used in comparative study. The most commonly mentioned alternative to Mill’s methods are the techniques developed by Ragin. First, there is the qualitative comparative analyses based on Boolean algebraic logic that allows the researcher to consider a number of different combinations of variables as the causes of a specific outcome; the fact that this method allows for several different causal paths that could lead to the same outcome is a definite advantage over Mill’s methods. (Mahoney, 2007, p.135) More recently, Ragin introduced so called “fuzzy sets” which allows for a sort of classification system by coding the independent and dependent variables from 0 to 1. The independent variable represents a necessary cause if in every analyzed case, the value of the dependent variable is the same or smaller than the independent variable. In the same way, the independent variable signifies a sufficient cause if the dependent variables are bigger or the same in all studied cases. (Karlson, 2008, p.72-73)

Case study in general has several advantages over other methodological concepts. Probably the most significant one is construct validity; in other words, the ability to measure the variables that are the best representatives of the theoretical concepts the analysis measures. Unlike statistical methods that can have problems with conceptual stretching (to create a larger sample, the researcher includes dissimilar cases) “case studies move in the opposite direction, refining concepts with a higher level of validity but doing so at the cost of producing generalizations applicable only over a smaller number of cases.” (Bennett, 2004, p.34) Case studies are also better than statistical analysis at formulating new theories¹⁶. By analyzing one or a few cases in depth, the case study possesses the ability to uncover new theoretical concepts. In comparison with other qualitative methods, case studies also have higher internal and external validity. Internal validity signifies the ability to prove a causal path between the independent and dependent variables. External validity, on the other hand, represents the possibility of using the theoretical conclusions in other cases; the results of the case study can be generalized and applied in other circumstances. (Karlson, 2008, p.84-85)

existence of the dependent variable. The sufficient cause on the other hand indicates that, while the existence of the independent variable is contingent on the existence of the dependent variable, the dependent variable is not determined by the presence of the independent variable because the outcome can be caused by other independent variables (Karlson, 2008, p.72-73)

¹⁶ Apart from construct validity and the ability to generate new theories, Bennett (2004, p.34-39) also mentions three other comparative advantages of case study methods – making inferences regarding causal mechanisms (by using process tracing), historical explanation of cases and addressing complex causal relations.

On the other hand, there are significant limits the researcher must be aware of when selecting case study as a research method. One of the greatest concerns is the case selection bias, when the researcher chooses such cases that represent an abridged sample along the dependent variable. In case studies, this problem is related to the confirmation bias, where the researcher only chooses the cases in which the relationships between dependent and independent variables prove in favor of the analyzed hypothesis and excludes those cases that would contradict the studied theory. When selecting a case, there are also a number of other biases quite common in case studies; for example, the selection based on extreme values of the variables¹⁷, on “historically important” cases or on availability of evidence. Other limitations include potential indeterminacy (this happens when the researcher is unable to determine just one explanation for a case; analyzing the evidence with the use of process tracing does not lead to the exclusion of all other explanations¹⁸), lack of representativeness (researchers often intentionally select cases that are not representative to the wider populations by analyzing deviant cases or such cases that provide strongest possible evidence in support of particular theories) or potential lack of independence of cases. (Bennett, 2004, p.39-45)

In comparison with statistical analysis, case studies suffer from a risk of lower internal validity, especially the decreased ability to control the causal effect of independent variables, as well as the external validity, since the smaller number of cases more often than not does not allow for broader generalizations. On the other hand, when compared to other qualitative methods, there is only a limited construct validity and limited ability to create new theories in the specific subjects of social reality where other methods have more to offer. (Karlas, 2008, p.85-86)

Lijphart (1971, p.685-690) for example also mentioned the problem of “many variables, small number of cases” as an issue that was of most concern to him. He suggested several ways of minimizing this limit, such as increasing the number of cases (extending the analysis geographically or through time), combining variables with similar characteristics, focusing on “comparable“ cases or focusing the comparative analysis on “key” variables.

However, in the following years, there has been a trend toward a more intricate justification of a focus on a small number of cases. Systematic and thorough analysis of a few cases has

¹⁷ In this case the researcher might be inclined to overstate or understate the relationship between the variables when generalizing the results to wider sample of cases. (Bennett, 2004, p. 40-41)

¹⁸ Some analysts connected this problem to the so called “degrees of freedom” problem since case studies often suffer from too many variables compared to the small number of cases. (Karlas, 2008, p.85-86)

proven to be valuable in hypothesis formulation and theory testing. Not only is such detailed analysis often not feasible in large number of cases (problem of limited resources), “constructing adequate comparisons has proved more difficult than had often been thought in the 1960s and early 1970s, in the initial days of enthusiasm for comparative statistical research.” (Collier, 1993, p.110) Applying a concept to a wider range of cases can cause conceptual stretching; the concept might not adequately fit to the new cases. Alternatively, those concepts, that can be used in a broad range of cases most easily, often suffer the opposite problem of being too general. Moreover, there are number of difficulties that can occur when generalizing the findings beyond the initial case study so the researchers must always be careful when doing so. (Collier, 1993, p. 108-111)

For the purpose of this thesis, after careful consideration, I selected the cases of Al Qaeda and the Islamic state for the across-case analysis. Both organizations share similar ideological background and can be considered representative of the general trend of radical Islamic terrorism. The fact that they are both relatively well-known and have been the focus of increased attention both by scholars and the general public also makes them good candidates for research as there is a lot of data on the topic available. Given that they are both grounded in Islamic religion, albeit its radical version, I will attempt to uncover the differences in the roles women generally fulfill in both organizations and especially the reason why women hold different positions in such quite similar organizations. Here, it is also important to note that neither organization, but Al Qaeda especially, is homogenous, therefore there are differences to be seen even inside the groups themselves which must be taken into account and incorporated into the analysis. Moreover, I hypothesize that the differences in female involvement between (and inside) the groups can be traced to stricter security situation the organizations face as well as the need to signal their commitment to their cause and differentiate themselves from rival groups in the same areas. Based on Eggert (2015), who conducted a comparative analysis of women fighters in Al Qaeda in Iraq and the Islamic state and concluded that the main reason for the inclusion of female fighters in AQI was the tightened security context and threat from military forces, I will attempt to provide evidence that the pressure from opposing security forces can, in fact, account for the difference in female involvement in the studied terrorist organizations. That would mean that if AQ (or one of its branches) was faced with a significant security risk, which would threaten its survival, the group’s position on female roles would change and the organization would be more

accepting of the inclusion of women in battle. Similarly, the same assumption could be made in the case of the Islamic state.

Apart from the general information on the case study method, a sort of guideline on how the research in this particular thesis will be conducted should be introduced. Following up on the theoretical background concerning the topic of women in terrorism, the classification given by Cragin and Daly (2009) of different positions women generally occupy in terrorist organizations seems to be especially relevant to this thesis. Based on the analysis of female participation in a representative number of terrorist groups, the typology distinguishes between several roles women have been observed to have ranging from purely support roles (e.g. logistics) to a more engaged involvement in the group's tactical operations and, in a limited number of cases, even leadership positions. Such categorization represents, in my opinion, a stepping stone in the analysis of women that take part in Al Qaeda and the Islamic state (rather as perpetrators in contrast to the prevalent sense of women as the victims of the terrorist violence).

In the following part of the thesis, first I will attempt to provide evidence of women taking on the roles described by the typology (logisticians; recruiters; suicide bombers; operational leaders and fighters; political vanguards), first in Al Qaeda, later in the Islamic state. More specifically, I will analyze statements from leaders of the groups and other influential members that can be considered representative of the groups' ideology as well as materials produced by the organizations for propaganda purposes to determine the ideological position these terrorist organizations have on the roles women can have. This will be followed by research into the roles women have been proven to play in AQ and the Islamic state based on the evidence provided by scholars and accounts of female terrorists in the media. Given the radical Islamist nature of both terrorist organizations, some of the roles (specifically the ones concerning leadership positions) will most likely not be present, however, research into the reasons the groups offer for such an exclusion of women from these specific responsibilities will be included to fully demonstrate the way these organizations perceive women and the roles they can play in the groups' organizational structure. Alternatively, it is also possible that women in these groups also have duties that were not included in the original typology, which will be revealed in the process of the research.

Subsequently, after the analysis of the female roles in both Al Qaeda and the Islamic state has been conducted, the next step will be focused on uncovering the possible similarities as well

as the differences in the studied roles among the two groups. Both of the aforementioned organizations are quite similar in terms of their ideology with only a few key differences (the Islamic state grew out of Al Qaeda, specifically Al Qaeda in Iraq, before it broke away from Al Qaeda and declared itself an independent organization); such a close connection might therefore allow to discover the possible reasons for the differences in the perception of women's roles in the respective groups. In other words, this should make it possible for the thesis to fulfill one of the goals of the case study method, in this case theory building, and reveal which distinguishing characteristics of the groups (or of the context in which they operate) might be able to account for the differences in the positions women generally occupy.

Finally, one additional limitation specific to this thesis should be mentioned. The issue concerns the data that will be used for the analysis of the cases. Given the nature of terrorist organizations and terrorism in general, the data used here will be mostly secondary, e.g. academic writings by scholars concerning the studied subject, as well as the propagandist materials produced by the Al Qaeda and the Islamic state themselves. It is important to at least consider however that these accounts might not reflect exactly the reality of women in these terrorist groups.

3. Al Qaeda

Contemporary terrorism is a broad subject encompassing countless organizations and individuals from all over the world. Still, much of the attention (especially in the first decade of the 21st century) from media, scholars and policy makers has been focused on Al Qaeda. Following the 9/11 attacks, it seems logical that everyone wished to understand the group that managed to successfully enact such a devastating attack, on the US soil no less, even though there are number of terrorist organizations that are not as well-known but can pose equally dangerous threat. Subsequent declaration of the war on terror and Al Qaeda's expansion by merging with local groups that often took the Al Qaeda name only added to the group's visibility and notoriety. However, as is the case with terrorism in general, much of the research into the organization has been focused on the male perspective. It is usually implicitly assumed that the perpetrators of terrorist violence are men; therefore it is important to take into account that women can not only be the victims of terrorism but can also actively or passively participate in the organization. It is true that Al Qaeda, as a radical Islamic group, has been generally reluctant to allow women to involve themselves in the actual fighting, however, that is not to say that women play no roles in the organization; in a few instances women even took on a more active role of a suicide bomber (mainly in the case of Al Qaeda in Iraq).

However, before continuing into the actual research of female roles in Al Qaeda, I believe a small introduction of the group is necessary to better understand the nuances of the analysis, since Al Qaeda can be better understood as a transnational phenomenon rather than a single, albeit international terrorist organization or even a coalition of such organizations. Al Qaeda and the groups affiliated with it "are held together by an appealing, broad-based ideology and diverse membership that cuts across ethnic, class, and national boundaries... [Al Qaeda's] organization consists of little more than a loose network, though some hierarchy does exist among top leadership." (Sjoberg, Cooke, Neal, 2011, p.14) Given this unique nature of the group, it is logical that such diversity translates even into female involvement in the particular groups. While some branches of Al Qaeda are quite reluctant to allow women to participate in the group's operations, others explicitly incorporate them into its structures.

What is now known as the core Al Qaeda (or Al Qaeda Central) was established by Osama bin Laden on August 11, 1988; emerging from the mujahedeen movement against the Soviet

occupation of Afghanistan (the group used financial resources, the fighters and recruiting and training structures that remained from the war against Soviets). In the following years, AQ managed to establish a network of donors (private, NGOs or businesses) around the world to support the group's terrorist activities and form connections with other similarly minded extremist Islamist organizations from across the globe by providing assistance (sending recruits, training manuals or equipment). In 1996, Bin Laden published an extensive and highly publicized fatwa in the newspaper al-Quds al-Arabi where he declared war on the United States. After the 9/11 attacks, Al Qaeda (and Islamist terrorism in general) has begun to be considered one of the most significant threats to international security. The subsequent pursuit by security forces led to a fundamental change in AQ's structure. Encouraging the affiliated groups to conduct attacks on the West (while sometimes providing operational or financial support) has become the prevalent strategy, therefore it is no surprise that the most well-known attacks after 9/11 associated with the AQ brand have been carried out either by affiliates or by local groups inspired and supported (in terms of finances or training) by AQ, rather than the core Al Qaeda itself. After the American forces managed to kill Bin Laden in May 2011, Ayman al-Zawahiri¹⁹ has become the new leader of the group. (Mapping Militants Project, 2015)

The long-term objective of the group is the establishment of a new Islamic state ruled by sharia law which would include all current and former Muslim states and serve as a platform for the expansion of Islam to the entire world. To achieve the restoration of medieval caliphate, the group employs extreme violence, however, AQ's violence can be described more pragmatic and instrumental; committed to promote its political aims and reinforce its message. The core generally discourages such plots that could alienate broader Muslim population (hence the opposition to sectarian killings of other Muslims). Furthermore, the United States has always been central to AQ's ideology as they are considered to be the main enemy of the organization, the global oppressor and international bully at war with Islam, a sort of puppet master manipulating governments all over the world; hence the need to destroy or at least weaken the US has been a continuing trope in Al Qaeda's ideology. (Rosenau, Powell, 2017, p.5-7)

¹⁹ Zawahiri was a leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), a faction of the Islamist movement in Egypt. It was on his behalf that the organizations developed close ties with Al Qaeda to the point where Zawahiri was considered by many the deputy head of AQ. Informally, EIJ merged with AQ in 1998; former merger took place in June 2001. (Mapping Militants Project, 2015)

Apart from the Al Qaeda Central, the affiliated groups operate as separate entities although they support the ideology and AQC's ultimate goal. Some of the groups are associated with AQ more closely than others. First, there are the AQ affiliates and associates which enjoy support and assistance from Al Qaeda, such as money, training or weapons. Although these organizations usually operate within their region, their support for the broader AQ cause allows Al Qaeda to present itself as a global jihad movement and remain visible on the international scene. There are also Al Qaeda locals which consist of small terrorist cells with some form of direct contact to AQ (e.g. in training camps). These small local groups often turn to AQC because they lack their own resources and professional training; their operations are often simple, aimed at creating chaos and fear. Lastly, we can also talk of the broader Al Qaeda network which encompasses radicalized individuals from all across the globe who adopted the AQ's ideology and goals and want to carry out terrorist attacks in its support, even though they do not have a direct connection to either AQ or other terrorist groups. (Sjoberg, Cooke, Neal, 2011, p.15-17)

Among the most well-known affiliates are Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) which operates in North Africa, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) that is considered to be one of the most active groups under the AQ umbrella as well as the closest one to AQC, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Al Shabaab in Somalia or Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria. Although the groups pledged their allegiance to AQC, the connection between the groups and Al Qaeda core is not always strong. Strains on the relationship can even cause the affiliated groups to separate from Al Qaeda and declare independence. AQI, for example, founded in 2002 by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, created a formal connection with Al Qaeda in 2004. However, AQI's brutality, sectarian violence and attacks that killed many Muslims brought criticisms from AQC. The disagreements continued after Zarqawi's death and resulted in the group's separation. The organization, under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, took on a new name – the Islamic State, and declared a caliphate with its leader being named the caliph (further information will be provided in the chapter on the Islamic state). Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the groups' allegiance is not constant, they can (and have in the past) change in time according to the context these groups operate in. (Mapping Militants Project, 2015)

This chapter is structured into three parts. First, I will examine the statements made by Al Qaeda leaders on female participation which can be considered indicative of the group's ideological stance on the subject. Next, I will look at the propaganda materials issued by Al

Qaeda that are designed to specifically target women. Finally, the last part will concern the actual roles women took on as part of the organization.

3.1. Perception of female roles by AQ leadership

When it comes to female participation in Al Qaeda, the issue has been briefly addressed in the 1996 fatwa “Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places” issued by Osama bin Laden. According to this text, women have an essential role but only in supporting positions, as facilitators, encouraging their male relatives to participate in jihad. Bin Laden (1996, p.24) explicitly states that “our women had set a tremendous example of generosity in the cause of Allah; they motivated and encouraged their sons, brothers and husbands to fight – in the cause of Allah – in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya and in other countries.” However, two years later, in 1998, the fatwa “Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders” does not mention the role of women at all, except for a brief remark of them being the victims of their enemies²⁰ (in this case the Zionists and the United States). On the other hand, in 2003, bin Laden officially recognized (in an audiotape broadcasted by Al Jazeera) that women indeed have a role to play within the organization and are thus expected to act their part. (Von Knop, 2007, p.406)

Later, in 2008, Ayman al-Zawahiri (while not the leader of the organization at the time, he was considered second-in-command and representing AQ’s views) also addressed the issue of women in Al Qaeda and jihad generally during an interview. To answer the question of whether women should participate in jihad in the Islamic Maghreb, he states that if there is a reason for jihad, it should be required by all. However, he dissuades women from leaving their children behind to go fight in jihad, advising them instead to be prepared to assist the mujahidin in other ways. Furthermore, later in the interview, he explicitly specifies that there are no women in Al Qaeda. “However, the women of the mujahidin play a heroic role in taking care of their houses and children.” (Zawahiri, 2008, p.30) So it would seem that while

²⁰ The victimization of women is a reoccurring theme in AQ’s statements. The portrayal of women as someone who is suffering and needs to be saved is often used as a recruiting tool. “The ideology of the global Salafi Jihad says that a reason to carry out the defensive Jihad is when a Muslim woman is held by the *kufar* (infidels), to ensure her freedom is *fard* (duty) upon the whole Muslim *ummah* (world Muslim community)” (Von Knop, 2007, p.406) For example, after the arrest of Hayla al-Qaysir (otherwise known as Umm al-Rabab) for terrorism affiliated charges, the deputy leader of AQAP, Sa’id al-Shihri (also known as Abu Sufyan al-Azdi) released a statement denouncing her arrest and appealing to other jihadis to join him in a raid on her behalf. Similarly, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Yahya al-Libi called on Muslims to join jihad to help liberate Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist who was convicted in the United States of the attempted murder of American military officers. (Lahoud, 2014, p.796)

Zawahiri follows the path set by bin Laden concerning women by further acknowledging their roles in jihad, the AQC is reluctant to allow women more active involvement (at least on the rhetorical level), only emphasizing their importance in supporting and encouraging the men to partake in jihad and more than that, denying women's participation in Al Qaeda at all.

One year after the interview, in December 2009, Zawahiri's wife, Umayma al-Zawahiri published a document called "Letter to My Muslim Sisters" in which she further contributed to the debate on female roles in AQ. She emphasizes that women should most importantly live in accordance with the Islamic law (e.g. wear the veil, raise their children in Islam and encourage their male kin to take part in jihad). She also stresses that the role of women is critical and so they "should work alongside the man in defense of her religion, territory and to defend them in her person (*tudafi'bi-nafsiha*). If she cannot do so [by donating] her money, or if she cannot do so by way of reaching out to her Muslim sisters through missionary activities in mosques, schools, colleges and homes, she should do so through the Internet where she could write her religious mission, disseminate it and spread the mission of the jihadis." (Zawahiri, 2009, cit. in Lahoud, 2010) However, she is unclear on the issue of whether women should fight in jihad the same way the men do. Even though she acknowledges the individual duty of defensive jihad that is placed on both men and women, she also says that women need to be accompanied by a man (with whom it is lawful for them to be) during the fight which creates great obstacles for female participation in military jihad. She mentions other ways women can be involved in jihad stating that "we put ourselves in the service of the jihadis, we carry out what they ask, whether in supporting them financially, serving their [practical] needs, supplying them with information, opinions, partaking in fighting or even [volunteering to carry out] a martyrdom operation... Our principal role... is to protect the jihadis [through] bringing up their children, [managing] their homes, and [keeping] their secrets." (Zawahiri, 2009, cit. in Lahoud, 2010) The mention of martyrdom operations is especially interesting here, as AQC has generally frowned upon female suicide attacks, emphasizing instead the woman's role as a wife and mother. In a second letter Umayma published in 2012 appealing to her "Muslim sisters" after the Arab spring, fighting is not mentioned. She advises instead (again) that the women need to raise their sons to embrace jihad and martyrdom. (Aasgaard, 2017, p. 104)

However, it is not only the leaders of AQC that issue statements about female involvement. In some cases, leaders of other branches of Al Qaeda seemed to be more welcoming of the idea of women fighters. The leader of AQI, Abu Mus'ab al Zarqawi issued a statement claiming

“war has broken out... if you [Muslim men] are not going to be chivalrous knights in this war (*fursan al-harb*), make way for women to wage it.”²¹ (Zarqawi, cit. in Lahoud, 2014, p.788)

Similarly, Yusuf al-Ayyiri, one of the ideological leaders of AQAP, published a document called “The Role of The Women in Fighting the Enemies”. He encourages women to take up a more active role in jihad, even though he emphasizes that does not mean actual fighting. By stating that “behind every great Mujahid is a woman”, he identifies the most important role of women as supporting and encouraging men to fight, since he also claims that women are what stops men from participating in jihad as they tie them to the world and create responsibilities that make it difficult for men to give up their lives. (Ayyiri, 2003, p.1-4) Ayyiri uses several examples from Islamic history as well as contemporary female fighters to demonstrate the commitment women should have without actually calling for women to enter the battlefield. However, what is even more important is the fact that the comments used in the text can be used as “the intellectual ground for the full participation of women in jihad among radical Muslims”. (Cook, 2005, p.382)

3.2. AQ’s propaganda centered on women

Apart from the statements made by Al Qaeda leadership, there exist other propaganda materials that the group uses to not only spread its message but also for recruitment purposes. With the spread of the Internet, the organization is able to reach a great number of potential members. AQ is well aware of the importance of its media strategy in terms of recruiting. Most of its propaganda materials focus on men, as they represent the preferred target group. For example, the online magazine *Inspire* which was first published in 2010 serves as a recruiting tool for Muslim men. It is written in English; therefore it is reasonable to assume it is meant specifically for those Muslim men who live in the West, by encouraging them to participate in jihad and offering advice on how to successfully launch a terrorist attack (e.g. direction on creating explosives). (Al-Tabaa, 2013, p.10) Occasionally, articles that appear to speak to Muslim women can also be found, however, in accordance with the official AQ statements, they seem to emphasize the role of mother and wife. (Aasgaard, 2017, p.104) One such text, for example, emphasized that women indeed have an important role to play in jihad,

²¹ However, it seems likely that Zarqawi meant to use this statement as a way to shame men into participating in jihad. (Lahoud, 2014, p. 789) On the other hand, Al Qaeda in Iraq is the only branch of Al Qaeda to extensively use women in martyrdom operations, so it is possible he was quite genuine in his call for them to actively join the fight.

that role is nevertheless limited to teaching their children about jihad and supporting their husbands. The author even addressed the “precious sister” stating that “your husband may be at the top of the most-wanted list, at a time he may also be imprisoned, deep grief and sorrow may pass by his side. At this particular time, you should be a crying shoulder for him, be supportive and be a source of strength for him.” (Umm Yahya, 2014, p.48-49)

On the other hand, while not expressly calling on women to join the violent jihad, the magazine glorifies those women who actually took it upon themselves to wage jihad while using their example to shame men into joining the fight. Such was the case with Roshonara Choudhry, a British woman convicted of the attempted murder of the member of the British Parliament, Stephen Timms. Choudhry herself has been radicalized on the Internet by watching online lectures of jihad’s ideologues, mainly al-Awlaqi and later Abdallah Azzam. (Lahoud, 2014, p.791-792) Subsequently, an article in *Inspire* commended her actions stating that “she has fulfilled a deed that is *fard’ayn* (individual obligatory)... A woman has shown to the *ummah*’s men the path of jihad! A woman my brothers! Shame on all the men for sitting on their hands while one of our women has taken up the individual jihad! She felt the need to do it simply because our men gave all too many excuses to refrain from it.” (al-Sana’ani, 2010, p.24)

However, AQ has also published online magazines specifically for women. In 2004, the Arabian Peninsula Women’s Information Bureau affiliated with AQAP began an online magazine called *Al-Khansaa*²². The content aims to encourage women to have larger roles in jihad while the traditional roles are still considered critical. The priority is given for women to support their husbands and prepare their sons to participate in jihad. (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.48) To underscore this, the editorial in the magazine explicitly stated that “we [Muslim women] stand shoulder to shoulder with our men, supporting them, helping them, and backing them up. We educate their sons and we prepare ourselves.” (Al Khansaa editorial, cit. in MEMRI, 2004) Even though the articles also include ways for women to physically prepare themselves for jihad, the traditional roles are emphasized instead of calling on women to participate in the actual fighting. (Lahoud, 2014, p. 790) This prominence of the indirect support of violent jihad can be illustrated by a quote from an article called “Obstacles in the Path of the Jihad Warrior Women”: “A Muslim woman is a female Jihad warrior always and

²² The name is taken from Al-Khansaa bint Omar, Islamic poetess who lived in the time of the Prophet Mohammed when she also converted to Islam. During her life, all four of her sons died in battle which is why she is known as the ‘mother of the shaheeds’ (martyrs). (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.48)

everywhere. She is a female Jihad warrior who wages Jihad by means of funding Jihad. She wages Jihad by means of waiting for her Jihad warrior husband, and when she educates her children to that which Allah loves. She wages jihad when she supports Jihad when she calls for jihad in word, deed, belief, and prayer.” (Umm Badr, cit. in Von Knop, 2007, p.397)

Similarly, the magazine *Al-Shamikhah* has launched in March 2011. It has been compared to Western magazines such as Cosmo, due to its similar design. Just like *Al-Khansaa*, it targets (potential) female supporters of Al Qaeda with the intention of motivating them to participate in jihad. The editorial calls on women as they “represent half of the society... The Islamic nation is in need of real women who can undertake the responsibility of protecting their nation. Taking care of men and supporting them could achieve this type of protection.” (Al Shamikhah editorial, cit. in Al-Tabaa, 2013, p.16) The magazine itself offers articles concerning beauty tips, etiquette for women as well as guidance on how to marry a mujahedeen and be a good wife. (Bloom, 2017, p.10)

The conservative view of women AQ has continuously maintained is best demonstrated in the newest magazine for women Al Qaeda has launched in December 2017. The magazine is called *Beituki* (which translates to “your home”) and seems to be taking inspiration (in terms of design) from Western lifestyle magazines. It offers advice on how to attract a warrior’s attention and be a good bride as well as domestic articles on how to take care of a home. It even includes love letters from a wife of an unnamed jihadist to her husband and advice column. The magazine seems to be AQ’s reaction to the other Islamic terrorist groups (such as the Islamic state or Taliban) which have called on women to actively join the fight. The organization seems to be concerned that women are becoming too empowered and involved, which goes against the conservative opinions of many of Al Qaeda’s members. (The Economist, 2018) That is why, instead of pictures of women with guns or training manuals to prepare women for violent jihad, the suggestions given in the magazine recommend Muslim women to “greet your husband with a smile when he comes and a smile when he goes”, “don’t dabble in his work... and certainly don’t hector him”, “make your house a paradise on earth” or “prepare the food your husband loves, prepare his bed after that and do what he wants.” (Benador, 2018)

Overall, all the propaganda materials and statements from AQ’s leaders concerning the roles of women seem to be focused on the traditional supporting roles rather than a more active involvement in jihad. Gender specific interpretation of jihad that does not involve actual

fighting has been developing; this female jihad encompasses all the supporting activities women are generally part of, in comparison to the violent jihad men wage, to demonstrate the same level of commitment to the cause. However, it is important to note that these propaganda materials do not always reflect the reality of women in Al Qaeda as will be seen in the last part of this chapter. It can be said that often they represent the ideal, what the group's ideology conveys, however, this ideological stance often changes according to what the organization and its branches around the world face in real life.

3.3. The roles of women in Al Qaeda

As was demonstrated in the theoretical part of this thesis, different scholars sometimes use various classifications of female roles in terrorist groups. These categorizations, while not completely alike, usually have only marginal differences generally characterizing the roles on a scale from supporting to positions signifying more active involvement, such as participating in fighting or even leadership structures. The typology set by Cragin and Daly (2009), which serves as a sort of guideline for this thesis, distinguishes between five distinct roles women can have within terrorist organizations. Female terrorists can generally serve as logisticians, recruiters, suicide bombers, operational leaders or fighters and political vanguards. It is important to remember that these roles are only abstract, women can move from one positions to another within the organization or fulfill responsibilities belonging to different roles.

The role of a logistician can include several different tasks (couriers, protectors, decoys). Evidence can be found that women have been used as couriers for Al Qaeda. For example, since women have easier time crossing borders, US security officials stated they have been used as messengers between Al Qaeda operatives in Iran and other countries. (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.28) Also in Morocco, in June 2002, three male suspects were arrested along with their wives by security agents because they were assumed to be planning a bomb attack of U.S. and British warships. The men were also said to have opened a 'sleeper' cell of Al Qaeda with the intention of recruiting Muslims and sending them to AQ training camps in Afghanistan. The women, on the other hand, were believed to deal with funds, purchased some of the materials necessary for the attacks and generally acted as couriers. (CNN, 2002) The responsibility for financial issues is not surprising; it is a duty that can be handled from home which is ideal for women in radical Islamic groups as they are often restricted from going outside alone; the

men in terrorist groups also face higher risk of death or arrest which makes it more convenient for women to handle the financial matters. (Von Knop, 2007, p.410-411)

Women in Al-Qaeda also play the role of protector, in a quite specific way. The AQ members are sometimes asked to marry into local communities which should secure the organization support and protection of the woman's family or even tribe. This could be seen, for example, in 2008, when AQ was reestablishing its network in the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Marrying its fighters to women from local tribes allowed AQ to solidify the relationships between these tribes and the terrorist organizations. This approach, however, has also backfired, for example, in Iraq. When AQI attempted to use the same strategy in al-Anbar (even going as far as trying to coerce marriages), the resentment the local Sunni leaders held over their women being forced to marry men who were often essentially foreign fighters contributed to the Sons of al-Anbar militias working with the US security forces against Al Qaeda in this region. (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.32-33)

Furthermore, as demonstrated above, the role of a wife (and subsequently a mother) is especially emphasized in AQ's ideology when it comes to the general position of women in the organization. Al Qaeda seems to be keen to stress that the most important role for a Muslim woman is to be a virtuous housewife by supporting her husband and motivating him to join jihad while also raising their children in the Islamic faith, thus creating the next generation of jihadists ready to participate in the fight against the enemies and defend the *ummah*. This perspective is repeated again and again not only in official AQ statements but it is also affirmed in many of the articles published in the online magazines. (Aasgaard, 2017, p.104)

The role of a recruiter is also evident in the terrorist group. Perhaps not so much in the sense of women actually recruiting other members into the organization; the Internet has made it possible for women to become more of propagandists, sharing stories and experiences of their lives and disseminating Al Qaeda's propaganda with the intention of gathering supporters for the cause and even motivating potential recruits to join the organization. However, these women mostly seem to be merely supporters of Al Qaeda who took the initiative and decided, on their own, to spread the AQ message rather than being directed by AQ leadership. (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.46-47) One example is a Moroccan-Belgian woman Malika El Aroud who started appearing on the Internet under the name Oum Obeyda as a widow of a martyr after her first husband was killed. Prior to 9/11 attacks, they traveled to Afghanistan together and

stayed in AQ training camps. Two days before 9/11, her husband killed the anti-Taliban resistance leader Ahmed Shah Massoud on the orders of bin Laden. Aroud later remarried and moved to Switzerland where she along with her new husband ran a number of pro-AQ websites and Internet forums. (Sciolino, Mekhennet, 2008) In a CNN interview in 2006, she proclaimed her love for Osama bin Laden. She also wrote a book called *Soldiers of Light* which, along with her activities on the Internet, made her somewhat famous among Al Qaeda supporters. Through her actions, she aimed to encourage other Muslims, both men and women, to support AQ's objectives and join the fight against the US and the West. (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.47)

Other online female supporters have been calling on men and women to join Al Qaeda. Wafa Al-Shihri, widow of former AQAP leader Saeed Al-Shihri, issued a statement in May 2010, where she proclaimed that "if your man is unable to defend and take care of you, come and enjoy the hospitality and protection of the best fighters in the Arabian Peninsula." (Al Shihri, cit. in Al-Saleh, 2014) She was later accused by Saudi authorities (along with a wife of another AQAP member, Arwa Al-Baghdadi) of providing operational and ideological support for the terrorist organization, in addition to the public calls for people to join Al Qaeda. Even more prominent was the case of Haylah Al-Qassir otherwise known in the media as the Lady of Al Qaeda. She was believed to be an important member of the organization herself (not just a jihadist's wife), she was especially successful with fundraising and recruiting new members, some of which might have been involved in suicide attacks carried out by the group.²³ (Al-Saleh, 2014)

Furthermore, evidence has been found that women "are enabling the resistance by participating in organizations or activities that serve as critical outreach for Al Qaeda."(Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.47) The previously mentioned *Al Khansaa* magazine was published by Arabian Peninsula Women's Information Bureau, a propagandist group created by Saudi Arabian women to gather support for Al Qaeda and its cause among other women in the Muslim world. (Cragin, Daly , 2009, p.48)

²³ Lahoud (2014, p.796) also mentions that she was responsible for training women for jihad before she was arrested in March 2010, however I did not manage to find collaborative statements anywhere in the press. On the other hand, it is true that an article from January 2010 published in the Telegraph mentioned that US security agents have been warned against female suicide bombers that might be trying to enter the country, at least two of those female terrorists were allegedly connected to AQAP. (Sherwell, Rayment, 2010) Therefore, it is possible that Qassir was involved in the training of other women or at least that AQAP has been preparing women for jihad. However, even without these allegations, Qassir still serves as an example of a woman that rose above the traditional role women generally have.

The concept of female jihad, compared to the male oriented version, encompasses the role of supporter and operational facilitator which are important to maintain support for the organization and its ideology as well as the group's operational capabilities, thus contributing to the group's survival. Given Al Qaeda's insistence on the exclusion of women from fighting, the emphasis on the female interpretation of jihad is not surprising when it is seen as a way for women to be more involved in jihad. The refusal of a more militant version of female jihad can be demonstrated by Umayma al Zawahiri's letter where she stressed different options women have to contribute to jihad but discouraged them from fighting. (Peresin, Cervone, 2015, p.496-499) Even though women in AQ usually remain unnoticed by the broader public (media, scholars and policy makers alike) unless they carry out suicide missions, it is true that they have the opportunity to influence both current and future generation of jihadists. Von Knop (2007, p.399) hypothesized that "encouraging the male relatives to participate in a terrorism organization and supporting as well as facilitating operations gives women power and access to the public realm."

Also, it is important to mention that women in the global Salafi Jihad often form so-called Sisterhoods which not only offer women a sense of belonging but also allow them to communicate either in person or on particular forums or websites on the Internet²⁴. Similar to the official AQ magazines, the websites give advice on how to be a good wife and mother, to support their husbands if they decide to carry out martyrdom operations or to help all martyrs. (Von Knop, 2007, p.405-409) The texts in AQ magazines also seem to support this gender specific jihad. An interview in *Al-Shamikha* with a mujahedeen widow Umm Muhaned shows that her opinions complement the view of the Sisterhoods on female jihad. (Al-Tabaa, 2013, p.17)

The women following this gender specific interpretation of jihad seek the female honor (*ird*=pelvis) instead of the male honor (*sharaf*). Women who participate in the male jihad are in this sense defective as it is not their place to take up arms or participate in suicide missions. (Von Knop, 2007, 410) To this end, Malika Aroud proclaimed once in an interview that "it's not my role to set off bombs – that's ridiculous. I have a weapon. It's to write. It's to speak out. That's my jihad. You can do many things with words. Writing is also a bomb." (Aroud, cit. in Sciolino, Mekhennet, 2008)

²⁴ It should be mentioned that not all Sisterhoods share a radical version of Islam like AQ. On the other hand, there are a number of different forums not associated with the Sisterhoods where women can share their radical views. (Von Knop, 2007, p. 408)

However, despite the notion of female jihad, there has been evidence of women in the role of suicide bombers. The accounts of female suicide terrorists connected to Al Qaeda have been carried out on behalf of its affiliated organization in Iraq (AQI). First female suicide attack the organization claimed responsibility for happened in September 2005. The tactic of using female suicide bombers has been attributed to Zarqawi, leader of AQI who was killed in 2006, with the intention, at least in part, of shaming men into joining jihad. Female suicide terrorists offered AQI series of advantages that are generally attributed to the use of women as suicide bombers - the element of surprise, the possibility of attacking targets of higher value as women have easier time getting past checkpoints, almost no need for training, greater media attention. It also expanded recruitment possibilities for AQI. It was alleged that the use of female suicide bombers was partially driven by necessity as AQI did not possess sufficient number of male recruits ready to carry out suicide missions. (Stone, Pattillo, 2011, p.160-165) After Zarqawi's death, AQI continued with the use of female suicide bombers. In September 2007, AQI leadership stated that a "brigade" of women suicide bombers has been created. (Davis, 2013, p.282) In 2009, Samira Ahmed Jassim (also known as "the mother of believers") confessed to recruiting over 80 women to carry out suicide missions (28 were allegedly able to successfully achieve their missions). In addition to the recruiting, she also admitted that she helped organize rape of young Iraqi women and later convinced them that their only option was to become a martyr. (Gonzalez-Perez, 2011, p. 60)

One of the most notorious examples of female suicide terrorists acting on behalf of AQI is Muriel Degauque. She was a Belgian convert who moved to Morocco with her second husband to study Islam. While there, her husband was recruited by AQ while she adopted strict Muslim practices. They returned to Belgium and later traveled to Iraq where she eventually (9 November 2005) carried out a suicide attack by detonating her suicide vest close to a US military patrol in Baquba managing to injure one soldier. The next day, her husband was also killed in a US military raid. (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p. 63-64) Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi is another example of AQI's use of female suicide bombers. Accompanied by her husband, she attempted to carry out an attack on a wedding party in a hotel in Jordan. Although she ultimately failed to detonate her explosives due to technical issues, her confession that aired Jordanian state television tremendously helped Zarqawi's media campaign. It is also interesting that Jordanian authorities were not aware of her involvement in the attack until after AQI claimed responsibility for it and stated that a woman was among the perpetrators. (Stone, Pattillo, 2011, p.160-165)

The other AQ branches appear to be reluctant to put women in fighting positions, let alone use them as suicide attackers. The central leadership seems especially against the idea. Zawahiri supposedly sent a letter to Zarqawi criticizing the tactics he used because he feared AQI's brutality and sectarian agenda would jeopardize long term goals of the group and alienate broader Muslim population. (Stone, Pattillo, 2011, p.162) On the other hand, during an interview published in London based newspaper Asharq al-Awsat in March 2003, a woman who called herself Umm Osama ("mother of Osama") claimed she was overseeing training camps for female martyrs affiliated with AQ and Taliban. However the existence of these training camps remains unconfirmed. (Chan, 2003)

The AQAP leadership also expressed disagreement with the use of female suicide terrorists claiming that "we don't want you to enter the battlefield during strife; we want you to emulate our female ancestors in their incitement to jihad, their preparedness for this, their patience, and passion in taking part in any activity for the sake of the victory of Islam."(Al-Saleh, 2014) Nevertheless, during a raid in Yemen conducted by US security forces in January 2017, it was reported that women were involved in the gunfight. (Gibbons-Neff, Ryan, 2017) This demonstrates that contrary to the claims of AQAP leadership, women are clearly ready to join the fight if the situation calls for it.

4. The Islamic State

The second case in this thesis concerns the Islamic State. Similar to Al Qaeda, IS embraces the ideology of radical Islam. However, the terrorist organizations cannot be considered completely alike in their ideological views. Even though the terrorist organization has been operating as an independent entity for much shorter time than Al Qaeda, its actions have attracted a lot of attention. The media reported extensively on the brutality the terrorists demonstrated when dealing with their enemies, the policy makers created a coalition with the purpose of defeating the group and scholars attempted to analyze the organization and the proto-state it managed to create so they could better understand its success and come up with appropriate anti-terrorism measures which would prevent IS from becoming even stronger. More attention was also paid to the women who joined the organization. Its popularity and the success the group enjoyed in encouraging both men and women to travel to its territory and become part of the Islamic State shocked the world; the number of Western women who decided to join the organization was especially shocking given the reports on the groups' treatment of women.

The militant group grew out of Al Qaeda in Iraq. Its origins can be found in the early 2000s when the leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, began training Salafi terrorists (with financial assistance of Bin Laden). Zarqawi's group, first named Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'al Jihad, was an important part of the insurgency against the American occupation of Iraq. In 2004, Zarqawi formally pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda and the group changed its name to Al Qaeda in Iraq. AQI often used overly brutal tactics and was involved in sectarian violence which brought criticism from AQC that feared the alienation of the Muslim population. In order to present itself as more Iraqi, the group merged with smaller local groups, first becoming Majis Shura al-Mujahidin and then, after Zarqawi's death in 2006, under the new leadership of Abu Ayub al-Masri, taking the name of the Islamic State of Iraq. However, the alienation of local Iraqis continued leading to the group's decline and overall struggle to remain a relevant player in the conflict. (Mapping Militants Project, 2017)

After the death of previous leaders, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took control of the group. The Coalition withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 helped the organization regroup and start new terror campaigns (e.g. "Breaking Walls" campaign aimed at freeing members of the group from prison). The Syrian civil war that also began in 2011 offered the jihadi group the opportunity

for expansion. In April 2013, the group was renamed again, now called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, after Baghdadi's move to Syria. Another AQ affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, operated in Syria which caused clashes between ISIS and AQC after Zawahiri declared that ISIS should limit its involvement and operate only in Iraq. This statement was publicly rejected by Baghdadi and after the groups failed to reconcile, the leadership of AQ officially announced it has no connection with ISIS in February 2014. (Mapping Militants Project, 2017)

After large territorial gains at the beginning of 2014, the organization declared the creation of caliphate on June 29, changing its name to the Islamic State and naming Baghdadi the Caliph. Although the expansion of the territory slowed after that, IS managed to expand to other countries (e.g. Libya) and even claim attacks in other parts of the world. (Mapping Militants Project, 2017) However, IS began to lose against the coalition and in 2017, it lost control of its biggest cities, first Mosul in July followed by Raqqa (IS self-declared capital) in October. Baghdadi even released an audio tape admitting the Islamic State is losing and urging its supporters to keep fighting. Nevertheless, there are still some IS members left in Iraq and Syria, estimates put their number around 30 000. (CNN, 2018) The group was pushed out of most of the territory it once controlled turning from the state-based terrorist organization back to an insurgent group. Contrary to the claims of victory over the Islamic State, the group remains active, especially in certain provinces in Iraq (e.g. Kirkuk and Salah ad-Dine). IS reportedly conducted on average 75 attacks per month in 2018 (which is higher than in 2016), however, the number of fatalities is significantly lower. In comparison to previous years, the attacks focused more on government and security targets than on civilians. (Markusen, 2018, p.1-5)

The actual creation of a proto-state²⁵ ruled by the strict interpretation of sharia law is important as it underscores the differences between IS and other jihadi organizations. In comparison to Al Qaeda, it concentrated on building and expanding the state, fighting the immediate enemies rather than directly focusing on the US and the West (however, IS often encouraged in its propaganda the so-called 'lone wolves' to execute attacks in its name). The focus on sectarianism is also a reoccurring feature in its ideology. Purifying the Islamic

²⁵ Other jihadi groups attempted to create similar state-like structures, however, only Taliban and Al-Shabaab in Somalia ruled over larger territories and population. Such proto-states were found to have four characteristics in common. They are built on a specific ideology – Islam and rule of sharia law; they are also international in the sense that they call on foreign fighters. They are aggressive towards their neighbors and international community in general. Lastly, they emphasize effectiveness in their rule and create functioning systems of justice. (Khelghat-Doost, 2017, p.19)

religion by targeting Shi'as and other Muslim factions is considered even more important than the fight against other non-Muslims. Moreover, IS propaganda often referenced apocalyptic writings presenting the Syrian conflict as a fight between the forces of God and His enemies. This view represents IS belief that Syria is considered to be the center of the Arab and Muslim worlds. (Byman, 2015, p.170-172)

The following text will be structured into two parts. As I have not found many official statements dealing with the issue of women, the first part will focus mainly on the perception of female roles in IS propaganda materials – mainly the articles in *Dabiq*, *Rumiyah* and the Manifesto on women by the Al-Khansaa Brigade. Like in the previous chapter, the second part will analyze the roles women have been proven to have in the Islamic State.

4.1. Perception of female roles in IS propaganda

The propaganda produced by the Islamic State has been very well organized. The group's media strategy has excluded foreign journalists from its territory which gave IS absolute control over the information about the state of life of the people living under its rule, including women. IS propagandists have been skillfully using social media sites to present an idealized picture of life in IS territory with the purpose of encouraging others to travel there and joining the organization. Like Al Qaeda, IS produced an online magazine called *Dabiq* whose goal is to spread its propaganda. The magazine has been translated into several languages including English and contained articles about everyday life in the caliphate offering rather romanticized portrait of reality. (Ali, 2015, p.9-11) From its 7th issue, a section titled 'To our sisters' has been added to specifically address Muslim women. *Dabiq* was later replaced by another magazine called *Rumiyah*.

At the declaration of the caliphate, Baghdadi called on Muslims to conduct *hijrah* (migrate) and travel to the territories controlled by the Islamic state. *Hijrah* in this case is presented as a religious obligation for all Muslims. At first, women were addressed only as a part of the Muslim community, however, the group later began to call on women specifically to make *hijrah*. (Tarras-Wahlberg, 2016, p.7) Several examples can be found in *Dabiq*. For example, a widow of Amedy Coulibaly (one of the perpetrators of the attacks in France) stated in an interview how glad she is to have fulfilled her religious duty by conducting *hijrah* and how happy she is now that she lives in the caliphate. (Umm Basir, 2015, p.50-51) Another article emphasizes the obligatory nature of *hijrah* for both men and women (referring to them as

‘twin halves’ of men) which will be rewarded by Allah; however, the author also warns the women that there are harsh punishments should they not make the *hijrah* or return to their homeland. (Al-Muhajirah, 2015a, p.32-37) Women are even encouraged to leave their husbands to make *hijrah* if they do not follow the right interpretation of Islam according to the IS. The author urges them not to wait on others to make *hijrah* and serve instead an example to follow reminding them “of the individual obligation on every Muslim and Muslimah to make *hijrah* from *dārul-kufr* [land of disbelief] to *dārul-islām* [land of islam].” (Al-Muhajirah, 2015b, p.42-48) The issue is mentioned even in the later magazine *Rumiyah* in an article when a widow of a martyr tells a story of the troubles she faced during her *hijrah* but ultimately how happy she is to now live under the sharia law in the Islamic State. (Al Muhajirah, 2017, 30-35)

Similarly to Al Qaeda, the propaganda mostly emphasizes the traditional roles of women. The role of wife and mother seems especially important to the ideology. A text in *Rumiyah* gives advice on how the woman should raise her children in Islam so they would support the jihad (the author even advises to show them videos of the mujahidin to inspire love of jihad and hatred of the enemies). (Rumiyah, 2017a, p.18-21) As for the jihad itself, several texts stress the supportive role women should have: “My sisters, be bases of support and safety for your husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons. Be advisors to them. They should find comfort and peace with you. Do not make things difficult for them. Facilitate all matters for them. Be strong and brave.” (Umm Basir, 2015, p.51) Similarly an article titled *A Jihad Without Fighting* explicitly addresses women’s exclusion from fighting while reaffirming they have a role in jihad: “The absence of an obligation of jihad and war upon the Muslim woman – except in defense against someone attacking her – does not overturn her role in building the *Ummah*, producing men, and sending them out to the fierceness of battle [...] Indeed you are in jihad when you await the return of your husband patiently [...] when you teach his children.” (Al-Muhajirah, 2015c, p.42) Another essay calls for women to participate in jihad by helping financially since “the Muslim women may miss out on much goodness in waging jihad with the sword, due to Allah’s favoring men therein, the great gate of jihad with wealth is left wide open.” (Rumiyah, 2016, p. 20)

On the other hand, as was the case with Al Qaeda’s propaganda materials, even though the IS does not necessarily call on women to participate in the combat, it has praised attacks conducted by women. For example, when three women attacked a police station in Mombasa, Kenya in the name of the Islamic State, IS expressed its approval in its media outlets. Even

though the women were described as supporters instead of female soldiers, many jihadis online criticized IS decision to praise the women's attack and raised concerns of female involvement in combative jihad. Some even suggested that calling on women to participate in combat would go against the purpose of jihad as it would compromise their modesty and honor. In a following issue of *al-Naba'* IS reacted to these criticisms by reminding its supporters of the group's view on the role of women in the society. An essay explains that women should devote their time to praying and taking care of their homes, but they are not forbidden to leave since the Wives of the Prophet did not stay at home all the time either. On the other hand the author also tells his Muslim 'brothers' they have the right to prohibit their wife from going out if she does so too frequently. (Lahoud, 2017, p. 61, 65-68) Similarly *Dabiq* celebrated the attack in San Bernardino, California carried out by Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife Tashfeen Malik. Her presence in the attack is mainly contributed to her husband; presenting her as merely a follower of his wishes. Furthermore the article uses her involvement as a way of shaming Muslim men to actively participate in jihad stating that "the brother's blessed wife accompanied him despite the fact that combat is not even obligatory for her, but she did not want to lose the opportunity for shahadah at a time when many "men" of the Ummah have turned away from the obligation of jihad." (Dabiq, 2016, p.3)

The role of women in jihad is also mentioned in later issues of *Rumiyah*. One article, for example, while still maintaining that the most important role for a woman is that of a wife and a mother, explicitly saying that "being supportive of your mujahidin husband is one of your key roles in the land of jihad" (Rumiyah, 2017b, p.14), also mentioned the possibility for women to participate in combative jihad stating that they should "rise with courage and sacrifice in this war as the righteous women did at the time of the Messenger of Allah." (Rumiyah, 2017b, p.15) Along with a statement made in *al-Naba'* that jihad becomes an obligation for women when the enemy enters her home, Winter and Margolin (2017, p.24) proposed that a shift in IS ideology can be observed towards a more militant interpretation of jihad for women. They linked this change to the significant territorial losses the organization suffered in 2017. This ideological shift was further emphasized by a later article in *al-Naba'* published on October 5, 2017 where IS explicitly called for women to become *mujahidat* (female holy warriors) referencing famous female fighters from Islamic history and stating that "today, in the context of this war against the Islamic state, and with all that is experienced of hardship and pain, it is mandatory for Muslim women to fulfill their duty from all aspects in supporting the mujahideen in this battle, by preparing themselves as mujahidat in the cause

of Allah, and readying to sacrifice themselves to defend the religion of Allah the Most High and Might.” (al-Naba, cit. in Katz, 2017) This is the first official directive given by the Islamic State that explicitly encourages women to fight framing their participation as an individual obligation in accordance with the doctrine of defensive jihad. To further stress its decision, a video was released on February 7, 2018 showing men and women fighting together in Iraq and Syria to “avenge the chaste women” (Bryson, 2018)

Overall, when it comes to the IS propaganda materials specifically targeting women, Tarras-Wahlberg (2016,p.7-18) found seven ‘promises’ women are frequently given – religious duty (fulfilled by making the *hijrah* into IS territory), state building (represented in the role of a mother by creating the next generation of fighters; the role of a wife in supporting her husband to wage jihad and the job opportunities necessary for the state, such as doctors or teachers), belonging (especially in contrast to the possible discrimination women may face in the West for being Muslims), sisterhood, adventure, romance and influence (restoration of caliphate is often presented as a way to give Muslims back power and influence).

It should also be mentioned that the IS propaganda references women in the position of slaves as the Islamic State became infamous for enslaving the women it considers infidels or idolaters. An article in MailOnline reported that the terrorist organization created a document concerning the prices of female and child slaves. Videos online demonstrate the view of IS members on female slaves as they joke about buying and selling them. (Ali, 2015, p.17-18) Meanwhile, IS published articles defending this enslavement of women as a religious duty by pointing to religious texts and referencing Islamic scholars. Muslim female recruits (especially those from the West) were on the other hand reassured that they would not be enslaved as enslaving true Muslims is illegal. (Aasgaard, 2017, p.108-110)

Finally, two documents need to be addressed as a part of IS propaganda. First is a document called *Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study*. It was published on 23 January 2015 by the Al-Khansaa Brigade’s media wing. It is not presented as an official piece of propaganda, however, given how strict the Islamic State is concerning its media strategy, it is difficult to imagine it would be published without IS approval. Especially interesting is also the fact that unlike many other materials concerning IS, this text was not translated to English, so it is possible to assume that the document was aimed primarily at Muslim women in Arab countries. The manifesto itself is divided into three parts. The first part aims to show everything that is wrong with the Western world. The author (or authors) is especially critical

of feminism as well as scientific research as it supposedly takes people's attention away from religion and God. The only sciences permissible for Muslims to study are those necessary to survival (agriculture, medicine, etc.). Like in the official propaganda materials, the role of woman as a good wife is emphasized (it is declared that girls can be married even as young as nine years old). The author claims that the men in the West are emasculated, not taking on their responsibilities towards their *ummah* or even their families, and so the women are forced into inappropriate roles. It is also stressed that apart from being a wife, the most important role is being a mother. On the other hand, the document describes specific circumstances under which women can take on different roles and leave their homes to serve their community (but not continually). Those circumstances are to study religion, being a female doctor or a teacher and to fight jihad (only in a very specific case when the country is being attacked and a fatwa declares women should also participate in jihad). The author emphasizes several times that education is also important and even offers a sort of curriculum concerning the ideal education for girls from the age of seven to fifteen. The learning is increasingly focused on religion although Arabic, basic sciences and manual skills related to raising children are included. The second part demonstrates the life in Mosul and Raqqa, cities under the control of the Islamic State. The document presents an idyllic image of a life that improved significantly as IS started to rule. It offers examples from better security and justice systems to healthcare and education. In Raqqa it also touches upon the life of foreign recruits stressing that there are no differences among the people living in the Islamic State as they are equal under the rule of Islam. The final part compares the life of women under IS with the women in the Arabian Peninsula leading to the assumption that the target audience for this document were mainly the women from this area. The author notes that women in the Arabian Peninsula are facing many threats – poverty, injustice, westernization which leads to the distortion of religion and destroys a woman's purity – and encourages them to leave and join women living idyllically in the Islamic State. (Quilliam foundation, 2015, p.5-40)

The second document is a treatise on women and combat released by the Zawra' Foundation in August 2015. The treatise called "*Valuable Advice and Important Analysis on the Rules for Women's Participation in Jihad*" stated four very specific conditions (mostly concerning self-defense or being given permission) when a woman may take part in combative jihad. The text concludes that although women are allowed to train, they should mostly focus on more traditional roles instead of combative jihad. (Winter, Margolin, 2017, p.26)

4.2. The roles of women in the Islamic State

Research²⁶ has shown that women in the Islamic State can perform a number of roles ranging from the traditional (wife, mother) to the more operational ones. The role of a wife and recruiter was found by far the most prevalent; however, there was also evidence of women in positions of authority such as patrol officers, principal advisors, prison guards and even combatants. More often than not, women take part in multiple roles, mostly in the combination of traditional and ideological support. Furthermore, the research analyzed the factors that could be influencing the type of roles women have, such as nationality. Considering this factor, foreigners were overrepresented in the role of a recruiter; on the other hand local women were primarily identified as wives. Interestingly, the research has also shown that the authoritative positions were all held by Arab women. Apart from nationality, age also seems to be an important factor in determining the roles women have in IS. The youngest women were found to be predominantly wives (14 to 18 years), followed by recruiters (19 to 24) and mothers (25 and older). Older women were also more likely to be in authoritative positions. Technical expertise and husband's rank²⁷ were also found to be factors influencing which position women in the organization occupies. (Spencer, 2016, p.90-96)

The presence of women on the Internet is especially significant. While women were used as propagandists even in Al Qaeda, the Islamic State has employed them in this position on a much larger scale. IS has relied heavily on its female members to spread its ideology and recruit new members (especially women). (Ali, 2015, p.5) In 2014, first blogs were written by women allegedly living in IS territory, for example the now blocked 'Diary of a Muhajirah'. The blog offered advice on how to make *hijrah* and what to bring; the author also answered questions. As is the case with other propaganda materials, it provided an idealized image of the life under IS. (Aasgaard, 2017, p.101-102) Social media platforms were aimed at presenting a utopian image of the caliphate. Women were found particularly influential (even

²⁶ When it comes to research concerning women in IS, it is important to remember that the data relating to nationality or age might be distorted due to the fact that the majority of reporting about IS women has been Western-based, the necessary data might also not be readily available due to the secretive nature of the terrorist organization. (Spencer, 2016, p.92-94)

²⁷ For example, Umm Sayyaf, wife of IS chief financial leader, represented one of the most influential women in the group. Allegedly she held a position as a main advisor on all female matters. After she was captured by US forces, she admitted she supervised American hostage, Kayla Mueller, on the order from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. During her interrogation, she also revealed a lot of information on the inner workings of the terrorist organization. However, even though she was in a position of authority that is rarely seen amongst women in IS, it is reasonable to assume that she would likely not have risen as high if it were not for her husband's position in the group. (Spencer, 2016, p.95-96)

more so than men) making them better equipped to radicalize others. (Huey, Inch, Peladeau, 2017, p.3)

Analysis of female twitter accounts supporting IS uncovered eight roles IS female members could have on this online platform and on social media in general. First role, fan girls, described young women who considered the organization ‘cool’; they mainly retweeted content of other IS supporters while also tweeting about their lives. They were not as radicalized or committed to the ideology as the women in other roles. Next were *Baqiya* members who considered themselves part of the online IS community; they disseminated propaganda and were more likely to potentially migrate to IS or contribute financially to the group’s cause. Women in the next role, propagandists, showed strong ideological commitment to the group. As the name suggests they produced large amount of pro-IS content with the intention of encouraging potential recruits to join. Recruiters, on the other hand, offered support (logistical, emotional, providing necessary information) to women who already decided to conduct *hijrah*. They also shared ‘success stories’ of women who already reached the caliphate. The Muhajirat publicly announced they have successfully made *hijrah* into the IS territory. They posted stories of their journey but also about the good life they now lived and how they contributed to the caliphate in the roles of wife and mother. Widows, on the other hand, praised the martyrdom of their husbands and shared posts expressing how proud they felt being the widows of a martyr. The last two roles the analysis offered were terrorists (people charged with offenses connected to terrorism) and leavers (previous members of IS social network that either abandoned pro-jihadists networks altogether or began supporting other terrorist organizations). (Huey, Inch, Peladeau, 2017, p.6-14)

An example of an IS female supporter prominent on social media can be Aqsa Mahmood otherwise known as Umm Layth, who was one of the most active IS supporters online. Before her online account was blocked, she encouraged women to make *hijrah* into IS territory offering practical advice on how to travel and what to bring while also offering emotional support to help women leave their home. (Ali, 2015, p.15) In her posts, she emphasized the sisterhood women will join once they reach IS, encouraging women to take charge of their lives: “The strength of the brotherhood and sisterhood here is most definitely shown through difficulties where someone who has no blood ties with you and not even a relation will make sure if their Muslim sister is in need of anything or if there is any problems.” (Umm Layth, cit. in Kneip, 2016, p.94) Umm Layth also talked about the life of women in the caliphate, stressing the importance of woman’s domestic role. She was particularly clear that women

should not expect to remain unmarried once they reach the Islamic State as she pointed out that life without a husband was especially difficult in IS due to the regulations on women's movement. (Hoyle, Bradford, Frenett, 2015, p.22) From the content of her posts it is apparent that according to her view, women should not participate in combative jihad, instead they need to focus on being good mothers and wives. She even explicitly states that "there is absolutely nothing for sisters to participate in *Qitaal* [fighting]... And the women you may have seen online participating are all part of a propaganda... For the time being *Qitaal* [fighting] is not *fardh ayn* [a compulsory religious duty] upon the sisters." (Umm Layth, cit. in Hoyle, Bradford, Frenett, 2015, p.32)

Another example could be Ahlam al-Nasr who became popular among IS supporters as a poetess. The quick online circulation of her book of verse called 'The Blaze of Truth' demonstrates IS attempt at cultural influence. (Chatterjee, 2016, p.210) More interestingly, her mother Iman Mustafa al-Bugha, who also strongly supported IS on social media networks, has been portrayed in internal IS documents as one of the group's ideologues. In her posts, she expressed enthusiasm for IS ideology and criticized its enemies. Even in summer 2016, when IS was losing territory, she often described the pleasant life in the caliphate on her Facebook page. (Lahoud, 2017, p. 62-64) Reports also appeared about the existence of an online digital cell of female supporters of IS called Free Our Sisters. Like the other group's online propagandists, the cell celebrated the actions of the Islamic State and took pride in the expansion of IS influence in the world. (Chatterjee, 2016, p.209)

IS media campaign has proven to be effective as a great number of women traveled to its territories from all over the world. Especially surprising is how successful IS became in targeting Western women. (Peresin, Cervone, 2015, p.504) Reports have stated that after the arrival of an unmarried woman in the caliphate, she was put in an all-women's hostel called *maqgar*. The accommodation was free and, in addition, women received monthly food supplies along with monthly allowance. If a woman arrived with her husband, they were given a house. The *muhajirat* (migrant) also got the spoils of wars from IS victories. (Hoyle, Bradford, Frennet, 2015, p.20-21) The Islamic State also allegedly established a matchmaking service and a school called *Al Zawra* that prepared women for their role as *mujahidin*²⁸. The matchmaking service served to make sure everyone was satisfied with their spouse, however a

²⁸ Some reports suggested that the school offers a curriculum focused on five disciplines – first aid training; social media marketing and computer programming; Islamic law; firearm and bomb training; domestic affairs. (Spencer, 2016, p.79)

lot of women reported having problems in their marriage. The members were ranked according to their appearance and nationality; foreign women along with converts were considered more valuable. The migrants were thought to perform better in their responsibilities as wife and mother than the locals so they were married off more quickly which reportedly caused jealousy and anger among the other women in *maqqar*. (Spencer, 2016, p.79-80)

The creation of proto-state led to new possibilities for women. Compared to other jihadi organizations, the Islamic State was particularly successful in incorporating women into its bureaucracy. It set up parallel gender-segregated institutions (concept that IS adopted from the practices of Iran and Saudi Arabia) and it was the first jihadi group that was able to successfully implement such policy over all of its territory. According to this policy, sections were created in almost every IS institution in order to deal with women's affairs; they were fully run by women, creating an effective separation from men. By reducing the interaction between opposite sexes, it provided women opportunities to function in a number of new roles while simultaneously allowing them to live as 'proper' Muslims which is, according to IS ideology, impossible to do in Western countries. Such division of state apparatus works to challenge the Western secular model of female emancipation by creating its own version which corresponds with IS orthodox interpretation of Islam and offers divine redemption. The IS model emphasizes the (biological) differences between sexes and stresses men's superiority. (Khelghat-Doost, 2017, p.19-21)

In practice, an example of this establishment of gender-segregated parallel institutions is the creation of the Al-Khansaa brigade. IS announced on February 2, 2014 an all-female brigade would be created as a 'morality police'. Abu Ahmad, an IS official in Raqqa, stated: "There are only women in this brigade, and we have given them their own facilities to prevent the mixture of men and women... [its members must] raise awareness among women, and arrest and punish women who do not follow the religion correctly. Jihad is not a man-only duty. Women must do their part as well." (Ahmad, cit. in al-Bahri, 2014) According to the reports, the brigade consisted only of young single women (18 to 25 years old), however there exist conflicting reports on the women's nationalities. The 'morality police' was tasked to start in Raqqa in late 2015, each member allegedly went through a 15-day weapons course (since they carry AK-47s) before the brigade started to patrol the city and ensuring that women living in

the IS territories followed the strict sharia laws²⁹. It was also reported that another task the Al-Khansaa brigade was given was to oversee detention camps. (Spencer, 2016, p.83-84) Another all-female brigade was announced at the same time as Al-Khansaa. In comparison, this brigade, called Umm Al-Rayan, was formed to expose men disguised as women to avoid detention at IS checkpoints. The female members were also required to be single and between 18 to 25 years old. (TRAC, n.d.) Furthermore another security institution, IS intelligence organization Emni was reported to use women as spies or during interrogation of female prisoners. (Davis, 2018, p.10)

The Islamic State created parallel female institutions in other state sectors as well. An institute for legal studies for women was allegedly opened in Mosul. (Lahoud, 2017, p.70) Men were forbidden to enter schools for girls; all members of the staff were female. Gender segregation was established even in the economic sphere, including the tax collection system which became especially important after IS lost access to the oil fields in Iraq and Syria. Healthcare was similarly affected. According to an account of a former resident, a woman only section was established in Mosul's general hospital. This separation of men and women in the state apparatus created a sort of counter narrative to the Western conception of female roles and simultaneously gave women a sense of importance in helping to build an effective caliphate; however, it also established a need for women with specific technical expertise. (Khelghat-Doost, 2017, p.22-23) There have been evidence that IS was at least partially successful in encouraging such women to make *hijrah* into IS territory; one example could be found on social media where a woman called Shams shared her experiences as an IS doctor. (Spencer, 2016, p.94-95)

However, even though there have been evidence of women becoming more involved in the workings of the organization, the traditional roles are still dominant. This is consistent with the concept of female jihad mentioned in the previous chapter, as women are mainly expected to support their husbands and raise their children to become the next generation of jihadists. Women presented as combatants were mostly part of the social media myth created as a recruiting tool³⁰ for Western Muslim women as the reality often differed significantly. (Winter, Margolin, 2017, p.25-26) On the other hand, there have been instances (although

²⁹ For example, strict dress code was imposed to hide a woman's body shape; she was required to wear two gowns, black hand gloves and cover her face by dark layers of two face veils. Make-up was forbidden all together. (Spencer, 2016, p.84)

³⁰ Sisters Zahra and Salma Halane often posted pictures practicing target shooting or holding weapons. They used their online presence to encourage women to also join IS becoming a sort of role models for other supporters wishing to make *hijrah*. (Ali, 2015, p.15-16)

rare) of women expressing their willingness to fight. IS female followers generally support and even celebrate its violent actions; only a small minority wishes to fight alongside the men. Moreover, even those who would welcome the combative jihad stress the importance of domestic roles. (Eggert, 2015, p.368) One woman, for example, wrote “I wonder if I can pull a Mulan and enter the battlefield.” (Umm Ubaydah, cit. in Hoyle, Bradford, Frennet, 2015, p. 32) In her statement referencing a Disney story, she clearly acknowledges that it is impossible for her to fulfill her desire to fight unless she disguised herself as a man. However, in another series of tweets, she urged women to focus on their domestic duties stating that “with my love for jihad, and participating, sisters, who ask me if women fight here [...] Honestly what can you do that the brothers can’t? [...] The best thing a man can do is jihad, and the best thing for a woman is to be a righteous wife and to raise righteous children.” (Umm Ubaydah, cit. in Hoyle, Bradford, Frennet, 2015, p. 31) The poetess Ahlam al-Nasr also expressed a desire to participate in combat saying that “it is not possible for me to accept any kind of lifestyle except the life of jihad. I strongly desire it. I want to struggle with all types of jihad: spiritual jihad (*jihad al-nafs*), the jihad of preaching and education, the jihad of [raising] money [to advance our cause], and the jihad with weapons also. Both male and female Companions [of the Prophet] did so, so why won’t we do the same?!!” (al-Nasr, cit. in Lahoud, 2017, 62)

However, as was mentioned in the previous part of the thesis, the official ideological position on women participating in combative jihad is changing after the group suffered significant territorial losses. Unverified reports of female IS fighters in Syria can be found dating back to July 2014, similarly unconfirmed reports on training of female suicide terrorists has appeared early in 2015. First mention of female combatants have been in Libya in February 2016 when seven female militants were arrested (and more than three killed) due to their connection to the attempted suicide attack of another woman. (Eggert, 2015, p.365- 366) In September 2016, French police succeeded in stopping an attack planned by four women; this first all-female cell was created by a known IS fighter in France. (Burke, 2016) In July 2017, reports have shown that a woman holding her baby conducted a suicide attack in Mosul injuring two soldiers and several civilians. This occurred after an incident where more than 20 women allegedly hid among the civilians and detonated their explosives. (Ensor, 2017) However, some scholars remain skeptical to these accounts of female suicide terrorists and female combatants in general. Bloom and Cottee (2017), for example, question the accuracy of these reports as the sources should not be taken at face value. Investigating in Iraq and Syria is quite difficult and so verifying the information is not always possible. The authors also consider the

silence of the Islamic organization on these martyrdom operations especially telling since the group has not shied away in the past from claiming its suicide operation. Furthermore, they question even the shift in IS ideology concerning this topic claiming the significance some analysts (like the previously mentioned Winter and Margolin) attribute to these statements is greatly exaggerated. Even though IS since then published statements explicitly calling on women to fight, the reports about female combatants and suicide soldiers should nevertheless be accepted with caution as the sources are often not very reliable.

On the other hand, as the group lost its territory in the fall of 2017, IS propaganda started to draw parallels between the position of the Islamic State and the threats AQI faced in 2008 when its tactics shifted to using new methods (e.g. using improvised explosives). It was also the time when female martyrdom operations on behalf of AQI significantly increased, even though the IS propaganda did not extend its statements to include female combatants and suicide attackers (until the previously mentioned article in *al-Naba'* in October 2017). Whether the accounts of female combatants prove to be directly coordinated by IS or not, the organization was nevertheless successful in inspiring women around the world to be involved in terrorist attacks in its support, for example in Turkey, France, Germany, the US or Kenya. (Davis, 2018, p.14-15) Furthermore, the groups that are formally affiliated with IS have used women in the role of suicide terrorists. Boko Haram, operating in Nigeria, pledged its allegiance to IS in 2015 rebranding the group as the Islamic State in West Africa. The organization has become quite notorious in its use of female martyrs, even employing girls as young as 10 years old. (Saikal, 2016, p.319) It began using women in its tactical operations as a response to the tightening security context in 2013 caused by the implementation of new strategies aimed at destroying the group. In this sense, the tactical use of female terrorists mirrors the trend seen in other terrorist groups like Al Qaeda in Iraq when women are employed as a result of a significant threat to the group's survival. Interestingly, Boko Haram has not used the emergence of female martyrs as a way to shame men into active participation as AQI leaders have done. (Zenn, Pearson, p.2014, p.49) The first female suicide bombing happened on June 8, 2014 when a woman detonated the explosives killing herself and a soldier nearby. Many other women followed her example³¹. However, reports have shown that majority of women in the group's terrorist campaign are forced to participate against their

³¹ Only from mid 2014 to late 2015, there were 75 female suicide attacks on behalf of Boko Haram killing hundreds of people in Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad. (Saikal, 2016, p.319)

will (especially young girls). Boko Haram reportedly abducts women to ensure the availability of possible female martyrs. (Nnam, Arua, Otu, 2018, p.37)

5. Comparative analysis

Now that the role of women in both Al Qaeda and the Islamic State has been introduced, it is necessary to conduct the across-case analysis to determine the validity of the hypothesis. The terrorist organizations share a lot of the opinions concerning the position of women in society. However, the analysis revealed that there have been differences in the roles women have played in each group in the past.

The traditional roles are presented as critical in both groups. Women are encouraged to participate more actively in jihad, not by actual fighting, but instead by supporting their husbands and raising their children appropriately to create the next generation of jihadis. In Al Qaeda, the continuous statements by the leadership supported by the content of its propaganda magazines showed that AQ considers the topic of women to be important, however, the actual message to its female supporters emphasized that women's place is primarily at home. In the same way, the magazines published by the Islamic State stress the need for women to focus on taking care of their husbands and raising their children. The IS online female supporters underline this view by sharing experiences of their lives under the rule of IS which most often encompasses the role of a housewife. (Aasgaard, 2017, p.103-105)

Going back to the typology introduced by Cragin and Daly (2009) which identified five different roles for women in terrorist organizations – logistician, recruiter, operational leader/fighter, suicide terrorist, political vanguard – it comes as no surprise that neither of the groups was found to include women in all the suggested roles. However, there has been evidence of women in the roles of logisticians, recruiters and even suicide bombers.

If we consider the role of a logistician more broadly to encompass overall operational support to the organization, reports have shown that women have been employed in this role by both organizations. In the case of Al Qaeda, there have been instances where the group used women as couriers, protectors and even decoys (the subcategories given by the typology). The role of a decoy here is a little different as AQ's member used only the disguise of a woman to avoid capture (even though unsuccessfully). (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.28, 32-33, 35) The Islamic State on the other hand has employed women more consistently and in different capacity in terms of operational support. The difference here is caused by the distinct nature the terrorist group had. Since IS managed (at least for a while) to create a proto-state, women were included in the actual state building process characterized by the establishment of parallel

gender-segregated institutions. (Khelghat-Doost, 2017, p.19) On the other hand, since the group lost its territory and became an insurgency oriented terrorist organization rather than the state-based one, it is possible that it will began employing women in the suggested conception of the role as couriers, protectors or decoys.

Women as recruiters were also present in both organizations. In AQ women were used more as propagandists, spreading the ideology and trying to reach a great number of potential members instead of actively recruiting. Several AQ female supporters in Saudi Arabia also formed a group that began to publish an online magazine *Al-Khansaa* designed to encourage women to join AQ. (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p.46-48) Even though the reports of women actually recruiting for AQ are rare, such examples still exist, like Haylah al-Qassir who was allegedly an important member of AQAP in terms of fundraising and recruiting. (Al-Saleh, 2014) IS, however, used women in this role on a much larger scale that was previously unseen in any other terrorist organizations. The online presence does not require leaving the house which allows women to take on a much more prominent role without violating the strict regulations IS put on women's movement. Women often act as recruiters, propagandists or inciters of violence. (Eggert, 2015, p.367) One of such women was Iman Mustafa al-Bugha who not only posted propagandistic messages on her social media platforms but was also allegedly referred to as one of IS 'luminaries' in internal IS documents. (Lahoud, 2017, p.63)

Overall, IS spent considerable amount of energy trying to recruit women, not only because it needed them as wives for its fighters or members of its state apparatus, but also because their presence in the Islamic State and especially the fact they voluntarily traveled to be able to join the group, helped legitimize the organization itself. (Eggert, 2015, 367) This is why women were encouraged to make *hijrah*, take on the role of migrants and travel to IS territories. *Hijrah* was presented as a religious duty and a way for women to be able to contribute to the establishment of the new Islamic caliphate. Neither Al Qaeda, nor other terrorist organizations, has focused on women in this role of migrants. The only mention of female migrants has been in an article published in *al-Risalah* in 2015, magazine which belonged to AQ's affiliate al Nusra operating in Syria. However, from the content of the article, it seems that the group does not necessarily have anything to offer women who would migrate to its territory nor does it desire for them to join the organization. (Aasgaard, 2017, p. 101-103)

All the aforementioned support roles contribute to the development of gender specific interpretation of jihad. Women contribute to jihad by providing operational and ideological

support as opposed to the male version that includes actual fighting. Furthermore this female jihad offers women on both current and future generation of jihadists. (Kneip, 2016, p.91) This perception of female jihad is often repeated and encouraged in both AQ and IS. Women's exclusion from combat and their overall lower incorporation into radical Islamist organizations is often justified by referencing classical texts from Islam concerning modesty, purity and similar concepts. (Khelghat-Doost, 2017, p.18) However, this is only another example of the groups' selective appropriation of Islamic tradition. Two types of jihad can be mentioned in the Islamic history – bigger jihad (struggle against the person's own self) and smaller jihad (fight in defense of religion). Smaller jihad emerged in the times of Prophet Mohammad when he defended Islam and the *ummah* against the infidels. However, the defensive understanding of jihad has not always been observed. (Saikal, 2016, p.314) The doctrine of offensive jihad has been used to justify waging war against others. This conception of jihad is regulated by a number of rules that determine who can participate and under what conditions. The defensive jihad on the other hand is not regulated as it is considered an individual obligation (*fard'ayn*) of every Muslim (man and woman) when the *ummah* has been under attack. (Lahoud, 2014, p.781) Even though the terrorist organizations often proclaim the Muslim community is under attack and therefore jihad must be waged to protect it, at the same time they keep using arguments to exclude women from the battlefield, such as the presence of a *mahram* (suitable male escort) which is often inconvenient to fulfill during combat thus making it impossible for women to participate. (Lahoud, 2017, p.69-70) Lahoud (2014, p.798) in this sense proposes that this ideological confusion stems from the fact that "jihadis are fearful of fighting alongside women on the battlefield because this will inevitably lead to a sexual revolution that would supplant jihad all together."

This is especially evident in the case of Al Qaeda. AQI's use of female suicide bombers has been an exception generally attributed to operational necessity caused by harsh anti-terrorist security measures. It provided a tactical and strategic advantage for the group and also offered a way to shame men into participating. (Stone, Pattillo, 2011, p.161,163-165) Furthermore, AQI used primarily European converts to take on the unconventional role of suicide attacker which allowed the organization to gain greater media attention while simultaneously avoid strong backlash from local Iraqi population. The group also used Islamic texts to frame female involvement as an individual obligation. (Eggert, 2015, p.372) However, even AQI emphasized women's traditional roles in supporting her husband and raising future jihadis claiming their presence in combat operations can only be allowed in specific circumstances.

This view seems to have been adopted also by the Islamic State. While the organization still held the majority of its territory, it had a great number of male combatants at its disposal, thus women were not needed to fulfill more operational roles and were encouraged instead to commit to their roles as mothers and wives. However IS never explicitly prohibited women from becoming suicide bombers or fighters. (al-Tamimi, 2017) Indeed several propaganda materials, while always stressing the traditional female roles, stated it was permissible for women to actively participate in military jihad although in very exceptional circumstances. The articles in IS online magazines as well as the Manifesto published by the Al Khansaa brigade allowed for this possibility; the Zawra' Foundation identified four instances when women can be directly involved in violent jihad – “if a women is raided in her house, she may defend herself [...] if she is in a hospital or a public place attacked by the *kuffar* [infidel] – and she has a [suicide] belt with her, she can detonate it [...] if she is in a solitary place and has been ordered by the *amir* she may use a sniper rifle [...] martyrdom operations are permissible for women but only if the *amir* has permitted it, and it is for the public good.” (Zawra' Foundation, cit. in Winter, Margolin, 2017, p.26) The organization even allowed for some training opportunities for women with the establishment of the all-female brigades or the *Al Zawra* school, even though the women were never expressly involved in fighting.

With the official change in the ideological position when IS called on women to take up arms (in *al-Naba'* article in October 2017), it seems the group is embracing the idea of the individual duty of jihad as presented in the case of defensive jihad. Given the defeat the organization suffered in 2017 which led to the loss of its territory, this rhetorical shift would fit the suggested hypothesis that a significant security threat to the group's survival would pave the way for female involvement in battle. On the other hand, the relative scarcity of the reports of female combatants and suicide bombers on behalf of IS along with the unreliability of sources evidencing these accounts, might signify that while the group may have changed its position on the topic on rhetorical level, the tactical shift to embrace female soldiers has not occurred yet, at least not in great numbers.

The case of AQ (and especially AQC) is a little different. Both Bin Laden and Zawahiri denied the inclusion of women in battle emphasizing the traditional female roles of wife and mother instead. Zawahiri's wife acknowledged the individual obligation that the defensive jihad places on men and women alike but also included the need for a woman to be accompanied by *mahram*. (Lahoud, 2010) However, in her second letter, after her husband has become a leader of AQC following Bin Laden's death, she does not mention fighting or

martyrdom operations at all. (Aasgaard, 2017, p.104) The fact that she refrained from mentioning female involvement in militant jihad in her second letter, after her husband took over the organization's leadership, is especially important since it possibly signifies she adapted the content of the letter to better suit the ideological position of AQC on the topic of women in jihad. Furthermore, the newest AQ magazine, *Beituki*, which has been released in December 2017, has generally been considered a reaction to IS call for female participation in combat. In contrast, the magazine offers articles that emphasize the role of women as wife and mother. (The Economist, 2018)

It would seem that unlike the Islamic State, Al Qaeda does not have any intention (at least now) to include women in its tactical operations. That could be attributed to the fact that unlike IS, it enjoys a relatively strong position and does not face any immediate danger to its existence. On the other hand, AQC has never been welcoming to the idea of female fighters. After the 9/11 attacks, the organization faced a significant backlash from the security forces that forced it to adapt and change its organizational structure by merging with local groups around the world. The security threat to the group caused by the harsh anti-terrorism measures was either not enough to force AQ to soften its ideological stance on women's roles or it is equally possible the group is generally adverse to the idea of including women in violent jihad.

Nonetheless, as it stands, the only AQ branch that has employed women in combat positions in greater number is AQI. Although the alleged presence of women connected to AQAP in the gunfight during the raid in Yemen might suggest that other AQ branches would welcome the inclusion of women in combat should the security context change. (Gibbons-Neff, Ryan, 2017) As of now, it seems that AQ is not pressured into including women in combat operations. Zawahiri has spent the last several years rebuilding the organization and solidifying its influence around the world by further strengthening the decentralization that began after 9/11 (AQ now enjoys strong presence, for example, in Yemen, Libya, Syria, Somalia and other countries). He also focused on protecting the AQ's senior leadership to ensure the group's long-term survival. Furthermore, the insistence on not conducting mass-casualty attacks allowed AQ to portray itself as "moderate" in comparison to IS and consequently resulted in the Islamic State being presented as the main enemy of the West, suffering the brunt of the assault by the Coalition, which, in turn, made it possible for AQ to rebuild its military capabilities. The resulting effect of Zawahiri's strategies is AQ's relatively

strong position in terms of manpower, influence and reach that does not create the need for the inclusion of women in other than traditional roles. (Hoffman, 2018)

Conclusion

In this master's thesis, I have been attempting to analyze the roles women have in terrorist organizations, mainly Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Given the similar ideological background the groups share, it is logical that their perception of women and female roles in the society is similar. However, there have been several differences in the roles women have played in AQ and IS, especially the roles concerning combat and suicide missions. The goal of this thesis was to uncover the reasons that could account for these differences.

Both terrorist groups strongly emphasize traditional roles for women – being a wife and a mother. Both groups also employed women as recruiters, although it is important to stress that the Islamic State used women in such position on a much larger scale. In contrast, I have not found any evidence that women took on leadership positions in either group. The traditional roles are stressed even in relation to jihad. Both groups claimed that women have important roles to play in jihad, however, only in supporting their husbands and raising their children to become the future generation of jihadis. This view corresponds with the concept of female jihad – gender interpretation of jihad that, unlike its masculine version which calls for men to fight, stresses the importance of women in providing ideological and operational support.

Given that IS managed to actually create a proto-state before it lost the territory in 2017, some of the differences in female roles can be attributed to the different nature of the groups. The Islamic State created parallel gender-segregated institutions for women that allowed them to participate much more actively in the group. Women in this sense could actually contribute to the creation of the caliphate. Some roles could even be considered as positions of authority, for example, the 'morality police' called the Al Khansaa brigade, even though its power only extended over other women. Since the group has needed women to join the organization and fulfill these roles, emphasis was also given to the role of women as migrants. Many propaganda materials called for women to make *hijrah* and travel to the territories controlled by the Islamic State. Al Qaeda has not made the same calls for women to join its organization since it does not have anything similar to offer. As Al Qaeda has different organizational structure, it cannot provide similar opportunities for women. However, it has employed women in the role of logisticians, as couriers and protectors, providing a different kind of operational support to the group.

Al Qaeda has continuously repeated in its propaganda materials that women should not participate in the actual fighting. Even though the group praised the women who conducted attacks in its magazines, the aim of such articles was more to shame men into participating than to actually call on women to follow their examples. I have not been able to find any evidence that would show AQ encouraging women to take up arms. The group even stressed its emphasis on traditional roles with the release of the new online magazine which is considered a reaction to the calls on women to participate in combat. The only exception has been Al Qaeda in Iraq which has employed women in combat roles, specifically martyrdom operations. Their use of women in such roles has been generally associated with operational necessity as the group has suffered significant losses caused by the opposing security forces. Furthermore it also provided the group significant tactical and strategic advantage.

The Islamic State on the other hand always maintained that there is a possibility for women to fight in specific circumstances. These circumstances were usually connected to the defense of *ummah* and Islam in general. These claims culminated in an article published in October 2017 when the Islamic State called on women to participate in combative jihad. This call followed many defeats IS suffered which led to the subsequent loss of territory and a shift from a state-based terrorist organization to an insurgency oriented group. These findings are in line with the suggested hypothesis which claims that it is the worsening security context which forces the terrorist organization to shift its stance on the roles of women from the domestic ones to the more operational ones.

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Diploma thesis project

Perception of women in terrorist organizations: comparative
study of the Islamic state and Al Qaeda



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Study programme: Political Science (N6701)

Year of project submission: 2017/2018

Introduction to the topic

In the contemporary world, violent terrorist attacks are seen as one of the main threats that have the potential to disrupt global peace and stability and endanger a significant number of people. Countless studies and academic books have been focused on the phenomenon of terrorism, terrorist organizations, their recruitment strategies and other aspects of this extensive and complex topic in order to better understand the phenomenon, to understand why people engage in terrorist activities to achieve their goals and how terrorist groups work, so successful counterterrorism strategies could be developed and possibly help prevent further acts of violence.

For the topic of my master's thesis, I have chosen to focus on a more feminist perspective to terrorism and contribute to the existing academic literature emphasizing the role of women in terrorism. Given the masculine character the terrorist organization are generally identified with, in the following thesis I intend to examine how women are perceived in terrorist groups, what are their supposed roles. With regard to the length of the thesis, the text will be specifically constructed as a comparative study of the roles of women in the Islamic state and Al Qaeda, building on the already existing knowledge about women in mentioned terrorist groups and female terrorism in general.

Research target, research question

As this thesis will be written as a comparative study, the research target is set to identify how women are seen in the studied terrorist organizations as well as to uncover the differences in perception of the roles women fulfill. More specifically, the framework of the thesis will be composed as an interpretative research.

The research questions are therefore stated in this way:

- How have the roles women fulfill in terrorist organizations evolved, specifically with regards to the cases of Al Qaeda and of the Islamic state?
- Given the similar radical Islamist background the two groups share, why are there differences in the perception of women and how do they affect the organization of the groups themselves?

Literature review

The topic of the roles of women in terrorist organizations in general is examined in the books written by for example Laura Sjoberg and Caron E.Gentry (2011) or Kim Cragin and Sara A.Daly (2009). This will be complemented by academic articles focusing on female involvement in modern terrorism; such as those written by Leonard Weinberg and William Eubank (2011); Mia Bloom (2017); Angela Dalton and Victor Asal (2011); Karen Jacques and Paul J.Taylor (2013); Tunde Agara (2015); Cagla Gul Yesevi (2014) and S.V.Raghavan and V.Balasubramaniyan (2014).

Academic literature focusing on the perception of women in Al Qaeda is examined by for example Andrea S.Aasgaard (2017); Anne Speckhard (2015); Jennifer P.Eggert (2015) or Katharina Von Knop (2007). These articles will be studied along with the propagandistic materials produced by the group itself (e.g. the magazine Inspire) to achieve as realistic description of the roles women fulfill in the group as possible. Subsequently, academic articles by authors like Hamoon Khelghat-Doost (2017); Katharina Kneip (2016); Amanda Spencer (2016); Charlie Winter (2015) and Nelly Lahoud (2017) will be used to examine the case of the Islamic state and the role of women in this particular terrorist group as well as the propagandistic materials like the magazine Dabiq.

More specifically, Bloom (2017), Tunde (2015), Wienberg and Eubank (2011) or Raghavan and Balasubramaniyan (2014) will help with the exploration of the evolution of female involvement in terrorism in general; followed by the works of Von Knop (2007) and Kneip (2016) that examine the aspect of female jihad in Al Qaeda and ISIS respectively, as a gender specific version of the radical ideology; while Speckhard (2015), Eggert (2015) and Aasgaard (2017) will allow for the comparison of female terrorists in the two groups. The other sources will serve to provide a more detailed picture of the perception of women in Al Qaeda and the Islamic state. Further relevant resources will be added later on.

Conceptual and theoretical framework, research hypotheses

In this master's thesis I intend to examine how women are engaged in terrorist groups. As such the best description of the theoretical framework of this text is that of the feminist scholars in international relations. However although the feminist theoretical roots are apparent, I do not intend to apply the theories directly in greater detail.

The research hypotheses are as following:

- Even though the involvement of women in terror groups is not strictly a new phenomenon, in recent years the perception of women in terrorist organizations has evolved from being seen as either victims or caretakers to a more active engagement in the life of the group, even as far as to participate in terrorist attacks.
- This is even more prevalent in the case of the Islamic state than in the case of Al Qaeda.
- Due to the radical Islamist background of both groups, the reasons for this difference are more practical than ideological or theological in nature; caused by stricter security situation, the higher degree of attention by the media female terrorists usually attract and the need for more active members.

Empirical data and analytical technique

The data used for this thesis will be primarily academic books and articles focusing on the relevant topic, in this case the role of women in studied terrorist organizations. Also the materials used as propaganda by the two groups (mainly the magazines Dabiq and Inspire) will be examined as an important source of insight into the structure of the groups and their ideology, particularly in regards to women and the way they are perceived. To test the hypotheses and to answer the research questions, the thesis will be constructed mainly as an explanatory case study. For the general examination of women in terrorism, more descriptive method would be used to analyze the evolution of the female roles in terror groups.

Planned thesis outline

- Introduction
- The Role of Women in Terrorist Organizations
- Case study - Al Qaeda
- Case study - Islamic State
- Women in AQ and IS – comparison
- Conclusion

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