



IMSIS
International Master
Security, Intelligence
& Strategic Studies



**Erasmus
Mundus**

**Where are the women?
Gender sensitivity in deradicalisation strategies for
female foreign terrorist fighters in Germany.**

July, 2023

**2659170S
233432
14525377**

**Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree
of
International Master in Security, Intelligence and Strategic Studies**

Word Count: 20382

Supervisor: Prof. PhDr. Emil Aslan, Ph.D.

Date of Submission: 18.07.2023

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine German deradicalisation practices for IS returnees in terms of their gender sensitivity. While the majority of former foreign terrorist fighters were men, up to one third of those who left Germany for Syria or Iraq were women. Furthermore, only women and their children have been repatriated so far as part of the coordinated repatriation efforts. There is thus a good reason to look at the issue using Germany as an example. The literature on deradicalisation suggests that gender plays an important role in this process and should be included in interventions. Therefore, it is also necessary to look at the adaptation of deradicalisation practices based on the gender of the person using the German example. Through expert interviews, the situation on the ground was investigated. The results of this work show that German interventions are already gender-sensitive to some extent. However, they are not named as such and much work and change are still needed to be able to call the whole method gender sensitive. Based on these findings, policy recommendations were formulated. Possible limitations of the work and further fields of research in the field of gender-sensitive deradicalisation are also mentioned.

Keywords:

Deradicalisation, Gender, Women, Islamic State, Foreign Terrorist Fighter, Germany, Expert Interview.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank several people who have supported me over the last few months during the writing of my master's thesis and also throughout the IMSISS programme. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Emil Aslan, for his insightful comments and constructive criticism on my thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Daniela PISOIU, who supervised me during my stay at the Austrian Institute of International Affairs and from whom I was able to learn a lot. I would also like to thank my interview partners, without them this work would not have been possible.

Another big thank you goes to my great fellow students, especially Caro, Clara, Chiara and Megan. Without you, the last two years would only have been half as much fun. I would also like to thank my friends from Germany, especially Dominik. You always had an open ear for me and gave me so much of your valuable time. I am also very grateful for the support my parents gave me during my studies, they always believed in me and always encouraged me to keep going. A special thanks goes to my sister Carolin, who spent several days over the last few years correcting my papers. Without her and my parents, I would not be the person I am today. Last but not least, I would like to thank my partner Luca, who has helped me through every low point and celebrated every high with me over the past years.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations.....	6
1. Introduction.....	7
2. Background Information.....	10
2.1 <i>Salafi Jihadism.....</i>	<i>10</i>
2.2 <i>The Islamic State.....</i>	<i>10</i>
2.3 <i>(German) Foreign Terrorist Fighters.....</i>	<i>11</i>
2.4 <i>The Field of Deradicalisation in Germany.....</i>	<i>12</i>
3. Literature Review.....	13
3.1 <i>Development of Female Jihadis.....</i>	<i>13</i>
3.2 <i>Gender and Terrorism.....</i>	<i>16</i>
3.3 <i>Deradicalisation of Violent Extremists (VE).....</i>	<i>18</i>
3.4 <i>Gender-sensitive Deradicalisation.....</i>	<i>21</i>
4. Research Design and Methodology.....	24
4.1 <i>Theoretical Framework and Research Design.....</i>	<i>24</i>
4.2 <i>Methods and Methodology.....</i>	<i>25</i>
4.3 <i>Coding Process.....</i>	<i>26</i>
5. Data Generation.....	28
5.1 <i>Document Analysis.....</i>	<i>28</i>
5.2 <i>The Expert Interviews.....</i>	<i>29</i>
5.3 <i>Ethical Considerations.....</i>	<i>32</i>
5.4 <i>Research Challenges and Limitations.....</i>	<i>32</i>
6. Analysis of Data.....	34
6.1 <i>The 2019 Guidelines for the Return of FTFs.....</i>	<i>34</i>
6.1.1 <i>(Structure of the) State Document.....</i>	<i>34</i>
6.1.2 <i>Actors.....</i>	<i>35</i>
6.1.3 <i>Methods.....</i>	<i>35</i>
6.1.4 <i>Foreign Terrorist Fighters.....</i>	<i>36</i>
6.1.5 <i>Gender-sensitivity.....</i>	<i>36</i>
6.1.6 <i>Deradicalisation.....</i>	<i>37</i>
6.2 <i>The Expert Interviews.....</i>	<i>37</i>
6.2.1 <i>Actors.....</i>	<i>37</i>
6.2.1.1 <i>Institutions and/or organisations.....</i>	<i>37</i>
6.2.1.2 <i>Influence.....</i>	<i>38</i>
6.2.1.3 <i>Location.....</i>	<i>38</i>

6.2.1.4 Cooperation.....	39
6.2.2 State Documents / Guidelines.....	39
6.2.2.1 Receiver.....	40
6.2.2.2 Producer.....	40
6.2.2.3 Impact.....	40
6.2.2.4 Collaboration.....	41
6.2.3 Methods.....	41
6.2.3.1 Explanation.....	41
6.2.3.2 Creation.....	42
6.2.3.3 Effectivity.....	43
6.2.3.4 Hurdles.....	43
6.2.4 Female FTFs.....	44
6.2.4.1 Differences.....	44
6.2.4.2 Similarities.....	46
6.2.4.3 Difficulties.....	46
6.2.4.4 Needs.....	46
6.2.5 Gender-sensitivity.....	47
6.2.5.1 Understanding.....	47
6.2.5.2 Creation.....	47
6.2.5.3 Potential.....	48
6.2.5.4 Impact.....	48
6.2.6 Deradicalisation.....	49
6.2.6.1 Definition.....	49
6.2.6.2 Concepts/Methods.....	49
6.2.6.3 Situation.....	50
6.2.6.4 Gender-sensitivity.....	50
7. Gender-sensitive Deradicalisation of FTFs in Germany.....	52
7.1 Gender-sensitive Deradicalisation Techniques (literature findings).....	52
7.2 Overview of the Research Findings.....	53
7.3 German Situation of Gender-sensitive Deradicalisation.....	58
7.4 Policy Recommendations for Gender-sensitive Deradicalisation.....	61
8. Conclusion.....	62
Bibliography.....	65
Appendix.....	73

Abbreviations

BAG RelEx	Federal Working Group on Religiously Based Extremism
BAMF	Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
BMFSFJ	Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth
BMI	Federal Ministry of the Interior
Ceops	Centre for Education on Online Prevention in Social Networks
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration
EU	European Union
FTF	Foreign Terrorist Fighter
ICAN	International Civil Society Action Network
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham / Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
RAN	Radicalisation Awareness Network
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States (of America)
VE	Violent Extremist

1. Introduction

“Our open and free society is a target of terrorism and extremism. The threat of attacks remains high. This risk is becoming greater due to radicalisation and experienced fighters returning from crisis zones and conflict areas” (Federal Foreign Office, 2023: 23). This statement is taken from the first ever German National Strategy which was presented in June 2023, found in the section *Our security environment*. Mentioning returning fighters in the National Security Strategy brings about different questions which range from the organisation of the return to the situation and location in Germany afterwards and also to the term *experienced fighters* in itself. In the German version of the document, both male and female fighters are separately named as potential threats. To put this information into perspective, following official data, more than 1,150 supporters from Germany have travelled to Syria and Iraq since 2013 to support the so-called "Islamic State" (IS) or other terrorist groups. Of those, about a quarter is female. It is estimated that more than 250 individuals of the overall group of supporters from Germany died in Syria or Iraq (as of March 2020) (Redaktion Infodienst Radikalisierungsprävention, 2022). About 40% of the individuals that have left for the so-called Islamic State have by now returned to Germany (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2023: 193). “Of the more than 80 German adult female returnees, 22 have been charged as of December 2021” (Koller and Schiele, 2022: 38). Especially looking at the record of official repatriation, only children and their mothers and one man (he was eleven when he left for Syria) were part of the six existing repatriation schemes (Tagesschau, 2022). Even before the official repatriation programmes, however, (former) IS members, both men and women, voluntarily returned to Germany.

With this information in mind and the overall stance towards repatriation, it is likely that the majority of people that will be repatriated in the future will also be women, as no strategy exists for the organised repatriation of men. When returnees are repatriated, they are prosecuted and are later introduced to a deradicalisation process in Germany (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2023: 194). However, these approaches are not visibly adapted to the gender of the

person. Yet, the needs and difficulties of working with men and women are different, which means that adaptation is needed. The aim of this research is therefore to examine deradicalisation strategies in Germany and assess them for their gender sensitivity. Germany was chosen as the empirical example of this research as it has one of the highest numbers of female IS-adherents in Europe and due to the specificity of the exclusively for women organised repatriation efforts. In addition, it is of utmost importance to look at this topic with a specific gender focus as the so-called Islamic State created with its actions a precedent for future terrorist organisations looking at the inclusion of women within the organisation. This translates into the fact that future organisations cannot fall behind the levels of engagement that were possible for women in the so-called Caliphate. Ingram *et al.* describe the extent of women's involvement in the IS system as a violation of the jihadi manifesto. They derive this from an analysis of a publication by the women-only police unit al-Khansa' Brigade (2020: 214).

Conducting empirical research comes with a number of limitations while also making the finding of concrete answers easier. Therefore, even though the findings of the subsequent research are focussed on Germany, they nevertheless can be generalised, especially in the European context. However, a sole country implies certain limitations in the research and can create a biased outcome which will also be addressed in a subsequent section of this thesis. In addition, it is important to mention that a significant amount of information as well as data that was used was in German, all the translations that can be found within this research were done by myself. Therefore, differences in translation might have occurred compared to translations that were conducted by other people, especially concerning the spoken word in German. This, however, does not impede the overall outcome of this research.

The overall objective of this research is to assess whether the neglect of gender-sensitive approaches in deradicalisation practices is a fundamental feature of German policy. To conduct this research, the following research question was formulated: *To what extent does the neglect of a gender perspective as an important aspect of deradicalisation efforts determine*

German policies on the reintegration of female foreign terrorist fighters? To answer this question, the following steps were taken. First background information is given on Salafi Jihadism, the Islamic State, (German) Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) and the field of deradicalisation in Germany. In the next section, the literature review, I engaged with the literature on the topic looking at female jihadis, gender and terrorism, deradicalisation of FTFs and lastly gender-sensitive deradicalisation. Up next is the introduction to the theoretical and methodological underpinning of this research, being a feminist approach with expert interviews as the main data set that was studied. Qualitative content analysis (QCA) with six categories and each of four sub-categories was chosen as the tool for the analysis of the information. It was gathered in expert interviews with practitioners, academic personnel, and official figures in the deradicalisation field in Germany. The main data was categorised and lastly edited for the final analysis. Beforehand the 2019 guidelines for the return of FTFs to Germany were introduced and also analysed following the previously mentioned categories which were established under the QCA framework. In the last section, the findings for deradicalisation specifically for women and also gender-sensitive approaches to the topic were compared and finally viewed as a whole based on the findings in the literature on the topic. Afterwards, policy recommendations for Germany were formulated which were based on the final discussion of the literature and the expert interviews. Rounding off the work, thoughts on further analysis in the field are shared.

2. Background Information

The aim of this section is to introduce the essential elements needed to carry out the research on the chosen topic: the Islamic State, Jihadism and the situation of FTFs in Germany before quickly mapping the field of deradicalisation in Germany. These items are central to an understanding of the topic before the deep-dive into gender-sensitive deradicalisation in Germany is started.

2.1 Salafi Jihadism

The basis for the foundation of the Islamic State lies in the movement's ideology, so-called Salafi jihadism. Rudder and Heffelfinger (2022) explain the development of this ideology, which is based on the religious school known as Wahabism. Wiktorowicz (2006) engages more intensively with the different sections of Salafism and their underlying explanation of jihad. Overall, the belief system is accentuated by the maintenance of purity in Islam as it is outlined in the Qur'an. Therewithin, "the West, Christians and Jews are seen as eternal enemies as they are destroying Islam by polluting it with their concepts and values", which explains the fear of Western influence (Wiktorowicz, 2006: 218). EUROPOL furthermore adds that Salafism is a "[...] movement that rejects democracy and elected parliaments, arguing that human legislation is at variance with God's status as the sole lawgiver. Jihadists aim to create an Islamic state governed exclusively by Islamic law (shari'a), as interpreted by them. [...] Contrary to other Salafist currents, which are mostly quietist, jihadists legitimise the use of violence with a reference to the classical Islamic doctrines on jihad, a term which literally means 'striving' or 'exertion', but which jihadists treat as religiously sanctioned warfare" (2022: 22).

2.2 The Islamic State

The Islamic State¹ saw its rise supported by the Syrian Civil War and the power vacuum in Iraq after the American drawback. The anti-Sunni government in Iraq increased IS's appeal to its supporters, who presented themselves as defenders of Sunni Islam. Territory was conquered in the period from 2011 to 2014 through terrorist campaigns which managed to penetrate Syria. In June 2014 the so-called Caliphate was proclaimed with its administrative capital in Raqqa, calling itself the Islamic State (Celso, 2018: xi). Fishman explains that the fighting between IS, and the allied forces went on also after the siege of Mosul when Iraqi forces managed to take back the city in 2017. When later Raqqa was won back by United States (US)-backed fighters, the number of FTFs decreased and a lot of the leaders of the group were killed (2022: 67). At its height IS's territory stretched over a third of Syria and 40% of Iraq. In 2018, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a US-backed coalition of Syrian Kurds and Arabs, increasingly captured the last IS strong-holds in eastern Syria. On 19.12.2018 US President Donald Trump declared the defeat of IS and voiced the intent to withdraw US troops from the area. The SDF continued fighting IS until the fall of Baghuz, Iraq on 23.03.2019 (Glenn, 2019). Byman explains the structures that the so-called Islamic "State" created were state-like such as the medical assistance that was provided to its residents. This was important for the inhabitants as it was the only support they could access during the days of the Caliphate (2016: 141). Another novelty for a terrorist organisation was the wealth that IS accumulated through the imposed taxes and the control of oil and gas resources in Syria (Byman, 2016: 141). In addition to controlling a vast area in Syria and Iraq, it had an international impact through control over cities and villages in Libya and attacks perpetrated in Europe (Beccaro, 2018: 207).

2.3 (German) Foreign Terrorist Fighters

In their evaluation of the Islamic State after the fall of the Caliphate, Cook and Vale have recorded 52,808 foreigners, including up to 6,902 foreign women

¹ Between 2011 and 2017 the Islamic State changed its name multiple times relating to different territorial expansions or events. Starting as Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) the name was changed to Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham / Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) after Syria was penetrated by the jihadists. After the establishment of the caliphate in June 2014, the term Islamic State (IS) was used. Throughout this paper, the term Islamic State (IS) and its abbreviation will be mostly used.

and up to 6,577 foreign minors that have joined the terrorist group (2019: 30). In addition, they estimated the number of returnees until 2019 to lay between 7,700 and 8,200. Out of which only 8% are women, however, it is not clear whether this information is up to date (Cook and Vale, 2019: 31). Two types of returns exist: the independent return, which is harder to track and control by governments, and the state-managed repatriation schemes. Different methods to treat the returnees exist from country to country, in some cases arrest, prosecution, and prison follow while other countries mostly work with deradicalisation and reintegration techniques (Cook and Vale, 2019: 31). In Germany, the returnees are prosecuted and later introduced to a deradicalisation process (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2023: 194). Focusing more on the data about German foreign fighters, the German internal intelligence service speaks of at least 1,150 people that have travelled to Syria and Iraq since 2011. For 65% of those, it is proven that they have joined IS, al-Qaida, or other supporting terrorist organisations. The authorities know of the death of at least 270 of them (2021: 185). Reynolds and Hafez conducted an analysis of German departees in order to assess the drivers for their mobilisation. They used data from 99 German foreign fighters (85 fighters male, 14 female) that travelled to Syria between 2012 and 2015 (2017: 666). Through the analysis they established that the biggest number of people represented in the data were radicalised in social networks, followed by lesser support for the integration deficit explanation and minor support for the online radicalisation theory (Reynolds and Hafez, 2017: 662). Questions that have remained unanswered, however, are the high recruitment rates of women, the high number of converts in the ranks and the clear geographical hotspots for recruitment (Reynolds and Hafez, 2017: 662).

2.4 The Field of Deradicalisation in Germany

The prevention landscape in Germany is characterised by a multitude of programmes and regional differences. At the same time, the pluralism and potential for cooperation between the individual actors are perceived as positive (BAMF, 2021: 130). Starting at the federal level, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) is responsible for the Radicalisation Advisory Service, which is also in charge of projects in the field of return

coordination or gender-sensitive deradicalisation work (BAMF, 2021: 127). As a security actor, the Federal Criminal Police Office, where the "Islamist Motivated Terrorism/Extremism" department has been monitoring the handling of returnees since 2019 (BAMF, 2021: 129). Through financial support from the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) and the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), numerous programmes are funded within civil society organisations, which are responsible for the implementation of and are significantly involved in the development of new methods for deradicalisation and reintegration purposes. Germany is a special case due to the amount of civil society actors involved in deradicalisation work. In a 2017 analysis of civic education and deradicalisation measures, 47% of projects were carried out by state actors. 1/3 of the projects were carried out at the state level and 20% at the federal, regional or municipal level (Baaken et al., 2018: 14). Due to its federal structure and specific deradicalisation model, Germany is described as a hybrid model in which neither the primacy of state nor civil society actors prevails (Baaken et al., 2018: 15).

Now that an overview of background information on the topic has been given, the next section of the literature review will focus on the nexus between female jihadis, gender and deradicalisation.

3. Literature Review

According to Vidino and Marone, the move of women to the caliphate as it was seen with the Islamic State is unprecedented and their incorporation into the system of the so-called caliphate has not been seen with other terror organisations (2020). Therefore, the necessity to engage with this topic more coherently is given. The goal of this research is to give an overview of gender-sensitive deradicalisation practices and to test the German empirical case against those. As deradicalisation is just one aspect within the overall field of women and terrorism it is important to dissect the different components more clearly as they influence the overall outcome. Those components are first, the starting point of the discussion looking into female jihadis, and second, the connection between gender and terrorism before engaging with approaches to

deradicalisation altogether. Lastly, the current literature on gender-sensitive deradicalisation is presented.

3.1 Development of Female Jihadis

To better understand why women joined the Islamic State terrorist organisation, the phenomenon of FTFs is first presented. The existential threat to the Muslim nation (*umma*) is always at the centre of the foreign fighter ideology. The use of foreign fighters (in the Salafist-Jihadist belief system) is the latest step on a scale where Muslim territories are already occupied and Muslims are massacred (Hegghammer, 2010: 73). The phenomenon of the foreign fighter is not new, as Malet explains by looking at the historical perspective (2010). Hegghammer offers a definition for foreign terrorist fighters which distinguishes them from mercenaries, soldiers, returning diaspora members or exiled rebels (2010: 58). Four aspects are important for the definition of those fighters: they are “[...] non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflict. [Hegghammer furthermore defines] a foreign fighter as an agent who (1) has joined, and operates within the confines of, an insurgency, (2) lacks citizenship of the conflict state or kinship links to its warring factions, (3) lacks affiliation to an official military organization, and (4) is unpaid” (Hegghammer, 2010: 57f.). Mendelsohn adds that foreign fighters can mostly be found in asymmetric conflicts, involving non-state actors, as the numbers of the fighters and their training is unpredictable and therefore a danger for nation states (2011: 190). Byman and Shapiro separate the process of foreign fighter radicalisation into five distinctive phases: decide, travel, train & fight, return, and (potential) plot (2014: 5ff.). Schmid and Tinnes cluster the radicalisation into push factors, e.g. traumatic experiences of violence or identity crisis, and pull factors, e.g. charismatic preachers or the promise of rewards in paradise (2015: 38). They summarise that positive and negative resilience factors such as no exposure to violence or the acceptance of democracy need to be strengthened while push factors need to be reduced and pull factors diminished to strengthen measures of preventing radicalisation (2015: 41). In a large-scale study, Brugh proved that men and women have different roles within the organisation, that their involvement differs, and that women are rarely parts of plots and active as

foreign fighters (2019: 91). Therefore, scholars agree that women should not be referred to as fighters as they are not engaged in active combat and therefore their threat level is different to the one that men pose. They are in a supportive role but if the necessity arises, they are willing to use violence or to be employed in suicide missions (Hoyle, Bradford and Frenett, 2016: 38).

In the early 2000s, several scholars first engaged with the question of female Muslim fighters or more generally women in terrorism which creates questions about the connection between gender and conservative religious beliefs. Cook (2005) is presenting the classical religious and legal literature on female participation in jihad. He concludes that for the most part, women did not fight in pre-modern times. However, radical Muslims were already pondering female participation in jihad. Problems that stayed unsolved were the potential reward for martyrdom, gender division and the maintenance of sexual purity. In the early 2000s, the only two groups in which women were also part of warfare were secularised and well-educated places such as Chechnya and Palestine (Cook, 2005: 383). Looking at the nexus between Salafi jihadism and gender, power and masculinity are the focus of the discussion (Pearson 2018). This becomes especially clear by looking at IS structures which are based on masculine hegemony and leave the reader questioning the appeal thereof on women. This appeal is created, however, through the portrayal of the IS ideology as an alternative to secular modernity (Pearson, 2018: 9).

Other researchers engaged with the element of surprise when using female terrorists. Cunningham concludes that the perceived smaller threat by female suicide bombers leads to an underestimation of female terrorists. Instead “female involvement with terrorist activity is widening ideologically, logistically, and regionally” (2003: 172). Bloom added to these discussions her findings about cases of female suicide bombers in which the sex of the perpetrator is used as an advantage to attack in surprise due to the gender stereotype surrounding women and violence (2005: 55). Also looking at female suicide bombers, Ali uses the term *Mujahidaat* to refer to Muslim female fighters which goes back to the early Muslim women that were active

on the battlefields, either in fighting or supporting roles (2006: 21). Some scholars even referred to the increased presence of women in jihad as the *feminisation of jihad* (Chowdhury, 2004). The term *feminisation of terror* is also employed in this context which Bodziany and Netczuk-Gwoździewicz (2021) underline by looking at the motives behind the participation of women in terroristic activities.

Another specificity of female jihadis can be found in their radicalisation. Pearson analysed the case of British Roshonara Choudhry who stabbed a Member of Parliament. She found four concepts that explain the mechanisms in place of female radicalisation: gender identity, gender structure, gender norms and gender ideology (2015: 13). In addition, Pearson finds that online radicalisation was significant in the case of Roshonara as the limited roles of Islam and Islamism in the physical world imposed on her as being female, drove her online. With limited knowledge of Islam, she was drawn into radical circles online and radicalised herself there (2015: 23). This is also supported by the findings of the Dutch Intelligence Service that sees women being drawn into the circle of radicalisation often do not have a lot of religious knowledge and they try to find this information in various sources. In this search for knowledge, they can easily fall into the clutches of jihadist preachers (2017: 4). Also, the German counterpart supports these findings in establishing clear differences in the radicalisation between men and women. They describe that women radicalise faster and mostly in closed circles in their social environments. Men are also radicalised in their social environment; however, this happens mostly in openly accessible settings (BKA, BfV and HKE, 2016: 60f.). Engaging with the reasons for the departure to the Islamic State, Perešin finds that “grievances, solutions and individual motivations” are the main driving factors for the women (2018: 39).

3.2 Gender and Terrorism

In the first edited volume on the intersection of gender and terrorism, Sjoberg and Gentry emphasise that women in terrorism are neither gender-neutral nor a separate category from men or masculinity. Instead, they are “[...] gendered actors, navigating gendered relationships and living in a gendered world“

(2011: 7). With the increased power of the Islamic State in the early 2010s, the literature on female radicalisation and the roles women occupied within the terrorist organisation increased steadily. Lahoud points out that in the religious script, so-called defensive jihad (*jihad al-daf'*) is the obligation of every Muslim (2014: 780). This, however, makes women 'the Achilles heel' of jihadist ideology which translates into the fact that the exclusion of women from jihad either means losing the credibility for defensive jihad or the loss of support by male fighters (Lahoud, 2014: 781). To keep the status quo Lahoud finds that IS kept the involvement of women in the terrorist organisation low by only opening limited roles which made sure that no sexual revolution undermined the jihadist efforts (2014: 798). In his research, Makanda (2019) sees a connection between the understanding of *jihad feminism* and the patriarchal society present within the so-called Caliphate. He concludes that contrary to Western feminism, which jihadi feminists oppose, the propagated version of feminism upholds male dominance within the organisation and does not invite to challenge the patriarchal society (Makanda, 2019: 153)

Phelan (2020) argues that four different approaches to the nexus of gender and terrorism exist. The first of these is a positivist approach which embraces the idea of the composition of a group and not their motivations. Therefore, this approach presents differences between men and women due to their demographics. She dissects the second approach as being instrumentalist in which the different roles that men and women are having are analysed (2020: 355). The third approach regards gendered motivations to join terrorism/violent extremism in the first place (Phelan, 2020: 356). The final approach is based on feminist methodology and focuses on gaps in the data that do not explain certain motivations or group dynamics, which could e.g. be structural factors that influence the choice to join a terrorist group (Phelan, 2020: 357). Her final call is to engage with the topic of terrorism, gender and women in a different form which she calls the integrated research agenda which takes into account all four previously mentioned approaches and tries to share the different findings within violent extremist groups (Phelan, 2020: 360).

Western women that joined IS self-identified as *Muhajirah*, the female version of *Mujahir* which roughly translates into a Muslim that is migrating from a problematic place to a better one (Perešin and Cervone, 2015: 495). This belief can also be found again in the main driving factors to leave for Syria or Iraq of these women: first, the unhappiness about the current living situation in the West, the wish to go to the ideal place (the caliphate) and lastly the religious calling for this act (Perešin and Cervone, 2015: 495). Spencer looked more into the different roles that women in the Islamic State occupied, by analysing 72 women involved in IS that have lived in the so-called Caliphate (2016: 89). In her analysis she gathers that the age, nationality, previous training/skills set, or the husband's rank all have an impact on the role that the woman has within the Islamic State's organisation (Spencer, 2016: 96f.). Almohammad and Speckhard call women the first victims of the Islamic State. They also played a vital role in the overall organisation, however, not as combatants but as members of the moral police or as online recruiters (2017: 2). Stereotypes surrounding female involvement in terrorism, supported by the representation in the media, picture the female terrorist and foreign fighter as the jihadi bride or the mislead young woman. Lahoud (2018) and Termeer and Duyvesteyn (2022) engaged with the gendered messaging of the Islamic State through an analysis of the magazines that the organisation used to attract new participants. Gendered messaging is also mentioned as a reason for joining IS in the first place in a report for the German police (Ziolkowski, 2017: 4). Bloom and Lokmanoglu looked at the differences in agency of female fighters and named five main reasons for the recruitment of women: Women as a substitution for lost manpower in battle, women as the more expendable cannon fodder, the increased media attention towards female jihadis, the increased draw on men to defend their masculinity in light of women taking their place and the tactical benefits to the organisation that the female sex entails (2020: 4f).

3.3 Deradicalisation of Violent Extremists (VE)

By establishing steps for the returnees, concepts such as deradicalisation and disengagement are mentioned, with an increasing focus on the role of women in this and gender-specific measures. The current academic literature in the field of deradicalisation is presented in the following.

Authors such as Horgan (2009a) claim that the emphasis in past research was put on the analysis of the drivers of radicalisation, while research into deradicalisation was neglected. He gives an overview of the different terms used in this context and distinguishes therewithin between deradicalisation and disengagement and underlines that leaving terrorism does not (necessarily) translate into a change of mindset (Horgan, 2009a: 292). Differences in approach and objectives are the key element in the various terms used to describe deradicalisation, however “[...] they commonly describe interventions that aim to increase the resilience and reduce the vulnerabilities of radicalised subjects through a diverse range of measures that include concentration on the psychological, material, social and religious aspects, among others” (Abbas, 2021: 80). In their analysis of different militant organisations, Souleimanov and Aliyev underline that the lines are oftentimes blurred between the different concepts that are used (2014: 24). In the following the two most used concepts in this context will be clarified: disengagement and deradicalisation.

In summary, disengagement means a person changes their behaviour without necessarily forsaking extremist views (Baaken et al., 2020: 4). Horgan sees psychological (disillusionment) and/or physical (role change) factors as the key drivers for disengagement (2009). When studying right-wing extremists in Scandinavia, Bjørge (1997) engaged heavily with the topic of disengagement, naming certain push and pull factors as reasons for leaving a terrorist organisation. In this context, push factors are connected with the involvement in the terrorist group that pushes for the exit such as disillusionment, pull factors are external draws that attract the individual (Bjørge: 1997). Engaging more with former members of violent extremist organisations helps researchers understand factors for disengagement. Horgan *et. al.* analysed the process of radicalisation until deradicalisation on the example of a right-wing violent extremist and engaged intensively with push and pull factors for exit (2017: 1). Speckhard and Yayla (2015) conducted interviews with IS defectors in which the interviewees call disillusionment with IS, more clearly a mismatch between the words and doings of the Islamic State as the reason for

their defection (114). Engaging with right-wing extremism in the US, Bubolz and Simi (2015) describe the exit process as multifaceted and made difficult due to (emotional) ties to the group or ideology.

In contrast, deradicalisation “[is the] process through which a radicalised individual gradually (re)processes and eventually discards their extremist views, resulting in a “deradicalised” person who at least no longer rejects the model of a democratic society and is ultimately even proactively willing, and most importantly, able to seek their own inclusion once again. Deradicalisation in this sense includes demobilisation or disengagement from activities related to extremist groups and/or beliefs” (Baaken et al, 2020: 5). Adding to this, Clutterbuck sees the following connection: deradicalisation targets behaviours such as insurgency or terrorism, by aiming at rehabilitation, cessation of violence and reintegration should follow afterwards (2015). Engaging more with the concept of deradicalisation, Koehler (2017) revisits established theories behind radicalisation to provide a theory for deradicalisation. Following Barrelle’s (2014) pro-integration model, three steps have to be taken in the process of disengagement and subsequent social reintegration which focuses on changes within the individual on three levels: commitment to the extremist group, self-identity and role model creation. Following the idea that every radicalisation process is different, also every deradicalisation journey needs to be adapted, which translates into the necessity for tailor-made interventions (Koehler, 2017: 81). Summarising, Koehler considers deradicalisation as a form of re-pluralisation supported by external actors or an individual change in belief or commitment (2017: 89). Aspects that should be considered when practicing deradicalisation are ideology, identity, and risk assessment (Baaken et al, 2020: 5). Furthermore, Doosje *et al* see changes on the *micro (individual), meso (group) and macro (societal)* level not only relevant for the radicalisation of a person but also for the deradicalisation (2016: 82). To conclude, the debate around the different concepts that are employed, Marsden explains that “[u]nderstanding the process of moving away from extremism as one of reintegration rather than ‘deradicalisation’ contextualises the individual, taking account of their wider ecology in ways

that do not over-prioritise questions of individual beliefs or ideology” (2017: 111).

Veldhuis ventures into a more practical approach to the topic when focusing on the design of rehabilitation and reintegration programs where she mentions that *outcomes, mechanisms and context* are the key components for a realist approach to program design (2012: 4). Adding to this Horgan and Braddock evaluate different deradicalisation programs to measure their success and establish lessons learned. They however find that the employed term “de-radicalisation programs” for the collective group of diverse programs is inappropriate and furthermore that the possibility to copy and paste programs from one country/situation to another is unachievable (2010: 286). The need for and also the difficulty of evaluating deradicalisation programs is also picked up by Schuurman and Bakker in their analysis of a Dutch reintegration project whereby they point out that the practitioners were aware of the distinction being made between disengagement and deradicalisation (2016: 78).

3.4 Gender-sensitive Deradicalisation

Introducing the question of gender to the topic of deradicalisation, it gets clear that a lot of research is still necessary, and that practices were only created in the last few years. Previous research has either underlined when women were overlooked in deradicalisation efforts or investigated women exiting right-wing extremism. Lastly, the literature was picking up on specific country cases with a focus on Islamism. Orbals and Poloni-Staudinger (2018) underline that the worldwide known Saudi-Arabian deradicalisation program completely ignores women, while in Indonesia women are only viewed as an important aid in the deradicalisation process of their husbands and in France the institutionalisation of a deradicalisation program for young girls made it fail (306f.). Looking at deradicalisation programs in South-East Asia, Suratman (2017) concludes that programs (in 2017 and earlier) do not distinguish between male or female participants. And while not a lot of programs exist specifically for women, Gielen underlines in her analysis of Dutch exit programs for female jihadis that the evaluation of the programs is even more difficult and overall disputed (2018: 455). Ní Aoláin and Huckerby (2018)

underline that especially the previous findings in Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) for the reintegration of women should serve as guidelines.

When studying exits of women from right-wing extremism, Glaser (2017) underlines that women are underrepresented in exit programs, that accessing the women is difficult, and that they oftentimes have experienced violence in their partnership or childhood which create added difficulties in the deradicalisation process. In addition, these women only see themselves as the girlfriend of a violent extremist, therefore not properly assessing their role in violent extremism. Adding to this, the stereotypical treatment of women as victims provides only certain types of care which are not appropriate for successful deradicalisation (Glaser, 2017: 345). Davis (2020) furthermore adds that the goals within preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programs are not effective for female target groups as the role of the women in the terrorist organisation is not understood or gender stereotypes are the basis for the intervention. Based on the inability to also cater to women, Schmidt makes clear that a necessity to include gender in disengagement and deradicalisation programs cannot be denied (2020). The necessity here lies in critically questioning stereotypical portrayals of women in terrorism as they lead to practices of disengagement and deradicalisation that “[...] ignore or downplay women’s importance in fostering violence” (Schmidt, 2020: 955). Brown adds that no intervention is gender neutral, even if it is described as targeting only one particular group, so it is all the more important that these methods can be applied to all people (2021). In analysing the role of women in post-IS jihadist transformation and in countering extremism, Perešin concludes that a “measured approach – one that recognises the reality and the consequences of women as both potential perpetrators and potential pacifiers – is vital for the safety and security of a world plagued with the threat of militant jihadism.” (2019: 115). In an analysis of female-only extremist online networks, Veilleux-Lepage *et al.* mention that gender-specific push and pull factors need to be incorporated into P/CVE as well as gender-sensitive risk analysis needs to be conducted. They especially point to the necessity of creating substitute programs for female defectors from extremist groups to

deal with the loss of the online network in which they were feeling a sense of belonging and understanding (2023: 242). Looking more clearly at the findings from interviews with women defectors from different Islamist terrorist groups, Shajkovci *et al.* (2023) find that gender-sensitive rehabilitation and reintegration efforts are underway in Somalia with al-Shabaab defectors since 2020. They underline that “[...] P/CVE strategies should include new avenues such as gender-sensitive skills training, counter-messaging, health care (including mental health) interventions, and post-exit support programmes for children of female defectors, among other support mechanisms. And finally, there must also be gender-conscious metrics for measuring the success of defection rehabilitation programmes” (Shajkovci *et al.*, 2023: 87). Looking at Boko Haram defectors, Botha (2021) finds that gender-sensitive practices exist within the Nigerian guidelines, but they are not enacted. He points especially to the importance of religious leaders considering reintroduction to society (Botha, 2021: 278). Looking into cases from different countries, in the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) – United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report (2019) good practices with female returnees following a multisectoral approach are presented. Aspects that were especially underlined within the treatments are trauma and mental health care, mentoring programs to sponsor reintegration into society, a holistic community-based reintegration method, and the creation of counternarratives (ICAN-UNDP, 2019). Other important aspects that need to be taken into account were shared within Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) meetings, in which the practitioners separated the interaction with female returnees into three categories: the parenting model which looks at the woman as a mother, the well-being model which focusses on physical and mental health, and lastly the deradicalisation and security model (Brown, 2021: 11). The five key goals within the models are “1) promoting individual mental health and well-being; 2) promoting family support; 3) promoting educational success; 4) promoting community support; and 5) improving structural conditions and protecting public safety” (Brown, 2021: 11f.). Differences between male and female deradicalisation can especially be seen when it comes to the security and justice sector and the different treatment therewithin, as well as in the health and social care sector as societal stigma

and trauma is reported in high numbers with female returnees (Brown, 2021: 12).

What is not known yet, however, is how countries are actually incorporating the findings on gender sensitivity within their own deradicalisation programs. In the following sections, to give more empirical underlining to those thoughts, the case study of German deradicalisation will be presented in order to test/see how female deradicalisation is practised in reality. The literature findings that were previously presented will lead the data analysis in a later step of the analysis. Germany was chosen for this research because of the high numbers of female IS adherents and returnees, the specific field of deradicalisation in Germany and the potential to create far-reaching findings through the study of one European example.

4. Research Design and Methodology

In the following section, the theoretical and methodological background for the research is given. It does not only focus on how the data was gathered and will be analysed, but also on which framework is used to eventually answer the research question.

4.1 Theoretical Framework and Research Design

Overall, a feminist mindset guides this approach. To make things clearer, the emphasis within this research is to add gender to the discussion, which makes previously unseen elements become visible and therefore enriches the overall outcome. “Genders are the characteristics associated with expectations of “being a man” or “being a woman.” Gender, then, describes the socially constituted behavioural expectations, stereotypes, and rules that construct masculinity and femininity” (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011: 6). Therefore, it becomes clear that gender is a social structure which influences power relations and creates inequality (Connell, 2021: 50). Gender theory provides a foundation for understanding the social construction of gender. Drawing on the

works of feminist theorists and scholars, this framework examines how gender is not a fixed biological attribute but a social construct that influences individual identities, roles, and behaviours. The theory recognises the existence of gender norms, expectations, and power dynamics. Based on this understanding the concept of gender mainstreaming was introduced by the United Nations community whose goal is to make public policy more inclusive by focusing on a diverse audience (Wdzięczak, 2022: 75). Part of this is also the way it is dealt with returnees. Looking at both male and female extremism is important in order to see the impact that these structures can have on group dynamics as well as on the agency of members of the group. Therefore, talking about gender can never be just talking about women, it always needs to take into account all other perspectives (Pearson, 2018: 15).

Two different approaches were chosen for this, expert interviews and content analysis. This research design answers different objectives: understand the current situation of gender-sensitive deradicalisation in Germany and create learnings for the future.

4.2 Methods and Methodology

Jihadi extremism is very much connected with a male point of view as most fighters were male. Also, previous experiences with violent extremists showed that the majority of those were male. With the Islamic State, a new era was started in which scholars even talked about the *feminisation of jihad*. Therefore, sticking with the focus on the male perspective only does not give the full picture. Looking at the situation on the ground, the figures show that at certain times up to 30% of the German departees were women. In addition, all the individuals that were returned through government efforts are female. This observation creates the necessity to ask questions about the adaptation of the programs in use specifically for women and overall, the usage of gender-sensitive approaches when dealing with returnees.

Being able to shift the perspective and leave traditional epistemologies, methodologies, and methods in which the male perspective was the focus (Beetham and Demetriades, 2007: 199), a feminist approach was chosen for this endeavour. Feminist researchers aim to question the

traditional/stereotypical system by employing critical perspectives (Beetham and Demetriades, 2007: 200). A feminist perspective, in line with the post-positivist movement allows the researcher to impact the research (Harding and Norberg, 2005: 2011). Following Cook and Fonow, principles of feminist methodology are to focus on gender and gender asymmetry in the analysis, the importance of a broad awareness about the topic in question, emphasis on research ethics and lastly the usage of research as a tool for empowerment (1986: 5). Guided by a feminist point of view the research question in this thesis will be approached. As indicated in the previous chapter this research focuses on the connection between deradicalisation methods, gender, and jihadi extremism. Using a feminist point of view will not only enable the need for research to be recognised but also to counter stereotypes in the field and raise awareness of the issue.

To answer the research question, *to what extent does the neglect of a gender perspective as an important aspect of deradicalisation efforts determine German policies on the reintegration of female foreign terrorist fighters* an empirical test will be conducted which has at its basis a case study of gender-sensitive deradicalisation in Germany. A case study is an in-depth analysis of a single case which allows an understanding of the overall phenomenon (Gerring, 2004: 341). Important aspects that need to be taken into account when conducting a case study are its uniqueness and simultaneously that its outcomes are not contradictory to other findings in the same field (Gerring, 2004: 351f.). Overall, case studies are separated into hypothesis-testing and hypothesis-generating cases (Levy, 2008: 3), where in the case of this research a hypothesis-testing case study will be conducted. The hypothesis to be tested is that a gender-specific component is missing in the German guidelines for the deradicalisation of FTF. Expert interviews will be used mostly as a tool in this research to conduct the case study. It is important to also take into account the shortcomings of case studies which can lay in the selection of the subject of the study. Further information on the potential limitations of this research is presented in *5.4 Research Challenges and Limitations*.

4.3 Coding Process

The guideline for the analysis in this research is the concept of Qualitative Content Analysis following Mayring (2015). The material that is used within QCA is always interpreted by looking at its origin and implications (Mayring, 2015: 369). Two models were established that guide the research that included specific steps for the analysis. The underlying forms of interpretation are the following: reducing the material to create an overview, providing additional information for unclear passages, and structuring the data (Mayring, 2015: 373). Inductive as well as deductive approaches are possible within QCA, while in this research a deductive approach was used. The decision for the deductive approach is based on the existing amount of literature in the field and the planned review of the information that was found during the expert interviews.

Based on the information stemming from the literature review, the first categories for analysis were created deductively. In this step, especially the findings within section 3.4 *Gender-sensitive deradicalisation* were of great importance. These are health, mindset, targeted interventions, religion/ideology, children, and support systems. As those are specific points and only looking at them would not allow me to map the whole practice of gender-sensitive deradicalisation currently underway in Germany, they were generalised in order to also include other aspects. Afterwards, additional categories were created by looking at the interview transcripts (*See table below*).

In the second step, subcategories were created. Afterwards, the coding guidelines were established and tested. After the first run-through, the categories and the coding scheme were assessed, looking at their potential to match the data and outcome. To analyse the vast amount of data that was created in the transcripts of the interview, the coding software QCAmap was used. The following category system was used which is the basis for the data analysis in chapter 6 of this thesis:

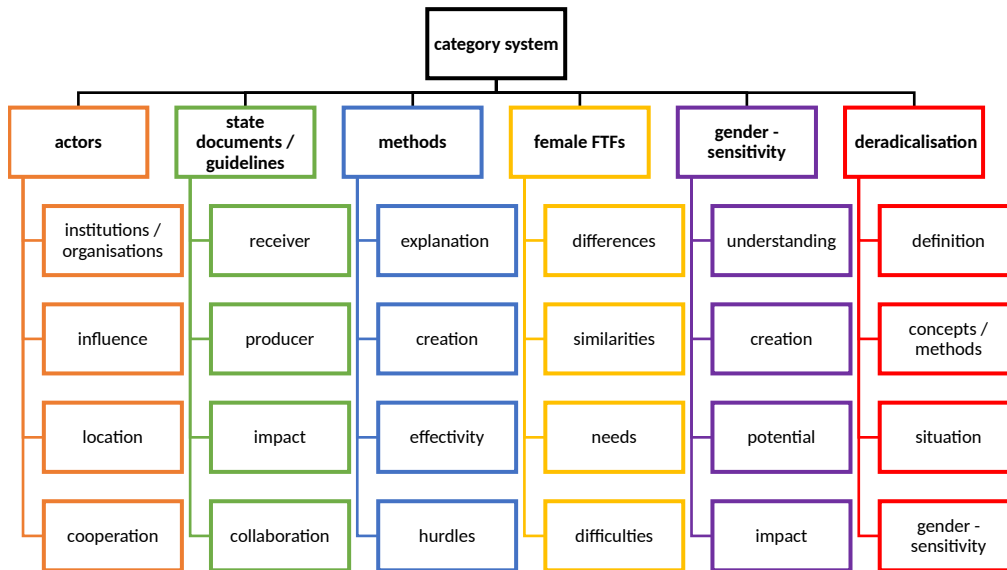


Illustration 1: Category system for QCA analysis (own illustration)

As main categories serve the following:

- category 1: **actors** which maps the deradicalisation scene in Germany;
- category 2: **state documents/guidelines** which tries to find the connection between state documents and the creation of programs for deradicalisation;
- category 3: **methods** which looks at the practices and strategies in place in the work with returnees;
- category 4: **specificities of female FTFs** which analyses the differences between male and female FTFs;
- category 5: **gender sensitivity** which focuses on the possibility to have gender-sensitive methods in practice;
- category 6: **deradicalisation** which presents the participants' understanding of the concept and of the possibility to engage in gender-sensitive deradicalisation.

The category system serves mostly to analyse the data gathered within the expert interviews, but it also serves as a guideline to engage with the state document *Report of the Federal Ministry of the Interior on "Dealing with returnees from the jihadist combat zones, especially Syria and Iraq" Guidelines for dealing holistically with returnees*. However, this will only be done in a simplified version which is presented in Chapter 5.1 *Document Analysis*.

5. Data Generation

The focus of this chapter is put on the access to the sources, as well as the ethical considerations and limitations of the research. As the majority of the information within this research stems from the expert interviews which will be introduced subsequently, the majority of the following information is concerning those.

5.1 Document Analysis

The first data set stems from the analysis of the official document that was presented to civil society organisations as well as the security sector in 2019 by the Conference of the Ministers of the Interior. Its name is *Report of the Federal Ministry of the Interior on "Dealing with returnees from the jihadist combat zones, especially Syria and Iraq" Guidelines for dealing holistically with returnees*. It gives an overview of the official German guidelines when it comes to dealing with returnees and serves as a basis for analysis. The document is open to the public and can be accessed via the website of the Ministry of Interior.² It is written in German and when necessary, translations of the original document were done by me.

5.2 The Expert Interviews

The second data set consists of the information gathered in semi-structured interviews with different experts in the field of deradicalisation in Germany. It is the focus of this research and therefore also in the centre of the explanations within the next steps. As it is such a highly sensitive topic which was only introduced to be studied not very long ago, a lot of research is still necessary and getting first-hand information from researchers as well as practitioners helps in the process.

However, it would have been necessary to also talk with returnees to get to know their point of view on the process, thus getting the full picture. As this

² https://www.innenministerkonferenz.de/IMK/DE/termine/to-beschluesse/2019-12-04_06/anlage-zu-top-9.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3

was the original idea for the research, I engaged with several players in the field to understand the access to the returnees better. In the summer of 2022, I contacted several civil society counselling services, reporters and official state institutions to get in touch with returnees to understand if it was possible to interview them for the thesis. Unfortunately, due to data security being very strict in Germany and also the wish of former returnees not to be the subject of research again, interviewing returnees directly proved to be impossible. Therefore, the idea of interviewing returnees was dropped. Subsequently, the focus of the research and also the research question was adapted to focus on the creation of the deradicalisation programs themselves and not their actual effectivity as this aspect is impossible to measure at the current point in time.

Following Bogner, Litting and Menz, experts are an important group of interview participants as they can offer answers in three different fields. They have technical knowledge, process knowledge, and interpretive knowledge when it comes to questions within their expertise (2014: 17f.). Therefore, the exchange with experts in the field not only allows to understand the field better but at the same time gives the analysis of strengths and shortcomings of the system in the first place.

However, getting access to the experts in the field proved to be rather difficult even though enough time was planned for this process. Looking at the information that was given in section 2.4 *The deradicalisation field in Germany* it becomes clear that in order to paint the full picture of actors within the deradicalisation field in Germany, it needed to be engaged with practitioners from civil society organisations, as well as state officials and lastly researchers.

From the beginning of February 2023, contact was established with a number of German researchers and practitioners. They were selected based on their activities and publications in the field and the focus on deradicalisation in their work. The first emails did unfortunately not lead to a lot of results, this is why a second round of emails was started in mid-February. One of the contacted institutions, the Centre for Education on Online Prevention in Social Networks (ceops), which was not available for an interview, introduced me to the

network “Federal Working Group on Religiously Based Extremism” (BAG RelEx). Even though the representatives of the network could not introduce me to their members directly, they pointed me in the direction of potential interview partners within their network. Several of those were available for an interview.

Overall, I contacted 22 different individuals/organisations from state representatives, academia, and civil society organisations. Of those, seven individuals were available for an interview. The other contacted individuals or institutions could either not answer my questions due to data security issues (state representatives) or did not have enough time for the interviews (practitioners in the field of deradicalisation or academic personnel) and some did not answer my emails at all.

To ensure the appropriate handling of personal information of the interviewees no names will be shared and only the field of work in which they are active will be named. The interview transcripts were anonymised and matched with an ID. They are not included in the appendix of the thesis to ensure that no conclusions from the content to the organisation or researcher can be made. The final group of interviewees represents a heterogenous group: out of the seven individuals four are women and three are men. They are working in state administration, civil society organisations, and academia. One person works as a return coordinator in a federal German state, two are academic researchers. The other four interviewees are working at three civil society organisations in three different federal states.

The interviews were between 20 and 50 minutes long in which every participant answered roughly the same questions. These can be found in the appendix of this thesis. All questions were cleared with the ethics committee of the University of Glasgow. The interviews took place in German to make the answering for the participants as easy and comfortable as possible. Every participant received two documents that explained the research idea and the content of the interview beforehand via email. All participants read and signed the documents. During the interview, in the first part of the session, every participant was introduced to the topic and questions were answered.

The interview questions were structured in three categories. The first related to the official German state documents, the second engaged with the professional experience of the interviewee with female returnees, and the last set of questions concerned the creation of gender-sensitive strategies for the deradicalisation of female former IS-adherents. In the first part, the questions surrounded the impact of state documents on methods for deradicalisation, as well as cooperation with national and international actors in the field. Second, questions on the actual relationship with female returnees were asked before engaging in more gender-specific questions relating to differences in male and female FTFs. It was further asked whether specific programs only for women are offered within their organisation. In the last section, the emphasis was on the potential creation of gender-sensitive deradicalisation methods and what they needed to entail before posing the final question in which the participants were asked if they believed that gender-sensitive methods would have a positive impact on the deradicalisation and reintegration of female returnees.

Apart from this, I gathered some background information on the individual's professional activity. Having seen that several aspects were answered within other questions, I adapted some of the questions to dig deeper or to present another angle. After I had conducted four interviews, I restructured some of the questions to get confirmation or disapproval about comments that were done multiple times throughout the first four interviews. This made my overall questions even more on point and enabled me to receive more detailed answers.

5.3 Ethical Considerations

As this research involved human subjects, multiple aspects had to be considered to ensure the proper conduct of the interviews. The first step in the process was the application to the Ethics Committee at the University of Glasgow to get official approval for the research. The research was considered low risk and after some minor adaptations, the final approval for the conduct of the interviews was reached in mid-February. Already in the initial e-mail contact with the participants, they were informed about the research, and it

was again verbalised during the interview session. As soon as the participants accepted to take part in the research, they received several documents to ensure their understanding of the research, how their data was used and stored and to consent to the research overall. The plain language statement declared, among others, that participation was voluntary, in which way the interviews will take place and that the data is stored securely with the researcher. Every participant then signed a consent form and is aware of the usage of their information in this master's thesis. It was also made clear that if potential difficulties in answering the questions existed, the participants could always decide not to answer them. In order to analyse the data easier and make access to the participants easier, all interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams. The application Microsoft Teams was chosen based on the proposal by the University of Glasgow for security reasons. The participants were informed that the interviews were recorded and that the recording was deleted after the transcription was completed. After the dissertation is finished and the master's program has ended, the personal data of the participants will be deleted. All remaining research will afterwards remain anonymised on an external storage system (flash drive) that only the author knows the position of.

5.4 Research Challenges and Limitations

Challenges that can arise when conducting research can mainly surround two areas, the data and the researcher. Accessing the data, in this case, was very difficult as getting in contact with the interview partners in the field of deradicalisation in Germany proved challenging. As previously explained, practitioners were either unavailable for an interview or state representatives could not participate due to data security reasons. Oftentimes shortage of staff and a high number of requests by other researchers were named as reasons for the decline of the interview invitation. In addition, due to data security reasons and ethical considerations, it was impossible to engage directly with IS returnees to hear their perspective on the discussion. As the research could therefore only be conducted with a limited number of participants, not all views on the topic could be represented and it is possible that the truth was distorted, and a one-sided picture was created.

The outcome of the research can also be distorted based on the mindset of the researcher, as a lack of reflexivity of the researcher can lead to a biased outcome. Following Stanley and Wise's understanding "[r]ecognition that who a researcher is, in terms of their sex, race, class and sexuality, affects what they 'find' in research is as true for feminist as any other researchers" (1992: 358). Therefore, being female and German impacts me in the conduct of this research. However, it is also one of the reasons, why I chose this topic. Therefore, I believe that it can also give me an angle which is interesting for the overall outcome. Especially when it comes to such a highly emotional and controversial topic that involves gender, the researcher's point of view on the whole debate cannot be neglected. First of all, through the consultation of academic literature on the topic and also the interviews with the participants that were male and female, I made sure that I was following a legitimate research interest and was not adding gender to a discussion where it was unnecessary. It is possible that the participants were influenced in their answering due to my sex. However, all questions were formulated in an open fashion, therefore all answers would have been possible which decreased the chances of bias. What I try to do in this research is to explain that gender is more than "just women" by focusing on femininity, masculinity and gendered stereotypes. Concluding, it is important to say that the research was possibly influenced by my point of view, I however feel that it rather made the outcome more interesting or even possible in the first place.

In the next step the data that is the basis for this analysis laying in the 2019 guidelines for the return of FTFs to Germany is presented before the data that was collected within the interviews is listed. The information gathered in both sections will be put within the previously introduced categories and sub-categories through which they are analysed coherently.

6. Analysis of Data

In the following section the previously introduced data, the 2019 guidelines for the return of FTFs, and the expert interviews are analysed following the beforehand introduced coding scheme in an abbreviated version.

6.1 The 2019 Guidelines for the Return of FTFs

The categories that were created deductively and introduced in section 4.3 *Coding Process* help to structure the information that can be found within the state document. As the focus of the analysis is on the information that was gathered within the expert interviews, the analysis of the state document is done in a shortened version. Analysing the state document in this fashion, however, allows to understand the initial situation in Germany.

6.1.1 (Structure of the) State Document

The document is structured in four sections. The first explains the idea behind and the reasons for the guidelines, and the second underlines the basic understanding behind dealing with returnees in Germany. Third, the document introduces the different categories of returnees and explains the necessary points of intervention for those individuals. The last section gives an overview of the different actors and methods in the field, which contains the majority of the information. It is also mentioned that a second, longer version of the document exists, which is not available to the public. The overall idea of the presented guidelines was to “develop recommendations for sustainable, interdisciplinary and cross-agency cooperation in dealing with returnees in a holistic manner. In doing so, reference should be made to the concrete cooperation between federal and state security authorities with other competent public and non-public agencies, especially in the field of deradicalisation” (BMI, 2019: 2).

6.1.2 Actors

Focusing on the different actors that are mentioned within the document, the Ministry of Interior differentiates into authorities on the federal and state level, control structures on the federal and municipal levels and lastly, organisations that conduct deradicalisation and intervention. Due to the various actors that are involved, it is important to clearly explain who they are. Looking at the authorities on the federal and state level, the “Advisory Service Radicalisation” funded by the Ministry for Migration and Refugees which

operates on the federal level is mentioned. An important actor for coordination purposes in the field of deradicalisation on the federal level is the state coordination office. In addition, the police force on the state and federal level is mentioned which conducts the risk assessment of the returnees. The next involved actor is the Office for the Protection of the Constitution which assembles all relevant information on the individual for prosecution. The judicial authorities are responsible for the prosecution of the individual. In cases of non-Germans returning to Germany the foreigners' authority reviews the possibilities to prevent re-entry into Germany. Control structures on the federal and municipal level are schools, kindergartens, social welfare offices, health and employment offices. The cooperation differs from case to case based on the need for strategic or operative support in different situations. Lastly, the providers of deradicalisation work and interventions are separated into state and non-state authorities. State programs that are active in deradicalisation work are mostly located within security authorities. It is underlined that a multitude of providers of deradicalisation in the federal states is located with non-state actors. Apart from deradicalisation work, those engage especially with methods on how to cope with trauma. They are also a key player in introducing the returnees to a stabilising environment for a successful future.

6.1.3 Methods

Looking at the methods that are mentioned, it becomes clear that effective coordination and continued monitoring are necessary to ensure success. In so-called case conferences, the cooperation between actors on different levels in the German system and also between state and non-state actors is made possible. The goal of those conferences is, among others, to discuss potential intervention points for targeted deradicalisation efforts which should have at its basis a multi-professional and interdisciplinary team. In addition, it shall help in creating the necessary preconditions to offer every person an individualised counselling and intervention concept with a focus on deradicalisation. The decided-upon methods for deradicalisation should be monitored by a central authority which could be the return coordinator.

6.1.4 Foreign Terrorist Fighters

The only differentiation that is being made within the document is looking at the different categories of returnees that exist. The first category differentiates between the risk assessment of the returnees. Following the document, returnees are either not playing a relevant role in the Islamist or Jihadist scene in Germany or they still do which means that they either still adhere to the extremist ideology and want/do not want to act upon it. The last group is disillusioned with their activities in IS, but could be radicalised again under specific circumstances. In all cases a combination of efforts from judicial and security authorities to organisations that offer deradicalisation services is necessary. The second categorisation is made based on the current location of the returnee, which is Germany when the person has already returned. This is the case with roughly a third of the German FTFs (data from 2018). Half of the people with a connection to Germany, however, are still mostly in Syria or Iraq (data from 2018) and are therefore called potential returnees. Especially, looking at the potential return of these individuals, a combined effort on state, federal, and municipal levels is necessary. If a returnee then returns with children, special precautions need to be taken.

6.1.5 Gender-sensitivity

The authors of the document underline that the generic masculine version of terms (such as returnee) is used in German to ensure easier reading. Apart from this, no differentiation between male or female returnees is made within the document.

6.1.6 Deradicalisation

Looking at the terms that are employed within the document, it becomes clear that what the authorities are aiming for is the deradicalisation of the person. Overall, the term disengagement (Distanzierung) is only used once in the document, while the term deradicalisation (Deradikalisierung) is used eleven times. However, no definition is given for either of the two terms. The deradicalisation efforts are located both with state as well as with non-state actors and it is seen as a combined effort of these different actors.

6.2 The Expert Interviews

The previously introduced coding scheme will now be applied to the expert interviews by looking at the following categories and their corresponding sub-categories: *actors, state documents, methods, female FTFs, gender-sensitivity, and deradicalisation.*

6.2.1 Actors

As previously explained, the actors in the deradicalisation field in Germany are various and they cooperate and engage in different ways. This will be presented more thoroughly in the following sections by looking at the different actors that exist, their interplay and location within the system and their influence on the deradicalisation process of the individual.

6.2.1.1 Institutions and/or organisations

Due to its federal character, Germany is centred around its federal states which means that differences exist from one state to another when it comes to the return of foreign fighters and subsequently their deradicalisation. Different from other countries, Germany does not have a top-down method that is employed in all situations. This is what has been described above as a hybrid model. Looking more clearly at the different actors, generally, the security sector and civil society emerge as the biggest figures.

In between emerges the role of the so-called “return coordinator”. It is a project financed by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry for Migrants and Refugees which was created in 2019. In the German states with the highest numbers of returning individuals (seven), a person each was selected as the coordinator. In the different states, the person can be located within different institutions, ranging from the police to the office for the protection of the constitution. Their duty is to prepare the return of individuals that are returning on their own or that are returning in a more controlled fashion through official returning schemes. The coordinator prepares meetings for every individual in which the different involved actors (mostly police, security authorities, prosecution, youth welfare officers and civil society organisations) come together. Summarised it can be said that “the security authorities don't work on

38

them [returnees] as long as the civil society actors. They look at them and see that everything is in order, no crimes are to be expected, the case is closed, and they have been successfully deradicalised. And that's just where our [civil society organisations] work begins. They haven't been criminals for a long time, they haven't been a danger for a long time, and yet we still see a huge need to work with those people” (Interview 2).

6.2.1.2 Influence

Taking into account the different actors that were named previously, it can be said that they not only engage in different time frames and settings, but they also have a different impact on the potential outcome. As several practitioners have underlined the deradicalisation process is a long and difficult journey. It is mostly structured by civil-society actors as those engage with the individual for a longer period of time. Therefore, their impact on this specific aspect is of utmost importance. However, when looking more clearly at the return to the country of origin and when the returnees are potentially convicted of a crime, the presence of the security and state actors is dominating. The interviewed participants concluded that it is a fruitful coexistence between the two groups in which both benefit from the experience and knowledge of the other group.

6.2.1.3 Location

Analysing the location or situation of the specific actor within the system, the already mentioned federal-state divide was addressed. Summarised it can be said that the security and state actors are the first responders who are being supported by the return coordinators who can be regarded as state personnel due to their financing. In addition, the civil-society actors support the system through their targeted interventions. Also, all civil-society organisations are in one way, or another financed by state institutions (such as ministries).

6.2.1.4 Cooperation

Lastly, the cooperation between the different actors in Germany and internationally will be presented more clearly. State actors gather on a regular basis for meetings, e.g. meetings between the different return coordinators.

However, due to the federal structure, more exchange and cooperation are necessary than in countries without a federal structure. Adding to this several practitioners mentioned that they cooperate with other civil society organisations in Germany as well as internationally. “In Germany, we have what I think is an extremely great and very, very sensible cooperation between civil society actors and the state, which is also internationally respected” (Interview 6). They also underlined that the experiences that the individual civil society organisation make are in the end shaping the guidelines subsequently created. As Germany is not following a top-down process, the guidelines cannot be presented by policymakers but are rather created in a combined effort. Going beyond the German focus, all actors mentioned that the interaction within RAN which is a European network is their most effective and important exchange option. They however add that money and resources prevent participation in (international) exchange whilst agreeing that more exchange would only be fruitful.

6.2.2 State Documents / Guidelines

To better understand the interaction between state actors and civil society organisations, guidelines for the deradicalisation of FTFs and their impact on the process will be analysed next. For this, the producer, as well as the receiver of the guidelines, will be looked at more clearly before engaging with the impact of those guidelines and the collaboration in the writing process. The guidelines referred to in this passage correspond to the official document that was presented to civil society organisations as well as the security sector in 2019 by the Conference of the Ministers of the Interior named *Report of the Federal Ministry of the Interior on "Dealing with returnees from the jihadist combat zones, especially Syria and Iraq" Guidelines for dealing holistically with returnees* which were analysed previously. It is important to add here that the term “guidelines” is used on purpose as the participants made clear that the term strategy would be inappropriate in the case of Germany. “So, I think you can't really talk about a strategy because there is no strategy for preventing or countering extremism in Germany either” (Interview 1).

6.2.2.1 Receiver

When engaging with the participants, different opinions were raised while talking about the receiver of the guidelines. Civil society organisations said they were issued to security actors, and state actors said they targeted civil society organisations. The overall understanding, however, was that those were created for actors that are not very well experienced in the field in order to create a basic understanding of the situation.

6.2.2.2 Producer

The ministers of the interior produced the previously mentioned document. As underlined by the participants, the process in which guidelines such as the 2019 document are normally created is one of mutual assistance in which the point of view of civil society organisations is highly valued. This holds especially as those organisations have gained experience on the ground for several years. One participant added that “these guidelines are always documents that are created in a dynamic field and that always lag behind the development, in a certain way perhaps” (Interview 4). This underscores the previously shared understanding that the impact of those guidelines is not regarded as substantive.

6.2.2.3 Impact

The discussion about the receiver of the information has already shown that different potential receivers are negating the effect/impact that those guidelines have on them. This translates into the fact that it cannot be talked about as a strategy and also not a conclusive guideline that everyone is following. One participant underlined that the guideline in question is a child of its time, meaning that with the research of the last years, aspects would be stated differently today than they were in 2019. In the participants' opinion, impact through the guidelines is mostly created for organisations that did not work extensively with the topic previously and can therefore take it as a guideline.

6.2.2.4 Collaboration

As previously explained the document in question was a combined effort of the ministries of the interior with the assistance of experts in the field. Looking at other documents/guidelines that participants mentioned, they underline the collaborative spirit in the drafting process and also the time it takes for the creation of such a guideline. Another aspect that influences the creation of such guidelines is international cooperation which is given in the form of United Nations (UN) documents or also in the context of exchange on the European Union (EU) level.

6.2.3 Methods

In the next step, the methods for deradicalisation employed by civil society in the field are presented, looking at their creation and effectivity, before engaging with potential hurdles/problems within the methods. This will allow to better understand the liberties that actors can take in the creation and the emphasis that they are putting on specific elements within the programs they are using for returnees.

6.2.3.1 Explanation

Looking first at the structure and content of the employed methods, the interview participants that are working at civil society organisations explained their models. They are based on systemic analysis that is done by social workers with specific training for counselling or psychologists. Systemic analysis in this context means to also look at the environment (the system) of the individual that is at the centre of the counselling. Different steps have to be taken in this process, the first of which is access to the returnees. Several access points were mentioned. First, the contact was already established before the return and maybe lasted throughout the active time spent with the Islamic State which was then mostly initiated by parents or other relatives of the individual. Second, when the person is put into custody after the return and the civil society organisation is introduced as a mediator between the security institutions and the individual. Third, the establishment of contact with the civil society organisation is initiated by the returnee him- or herself. It thus

becomes clear that the environment of the returnees plays a very important role which therefore needs to be part of the deradicalisation process.

The practitioners explained that the deradicalisation process is starting at the pragmatic level which means that assistance with basic questions, such as health insurance or how to get access to a lawyer, or how to renew a passport is provided. “What happens then is support, lots and lots of support. Support in various areas, i.e. in going to the authorities, in clarifying some cases of residence status.” (Interview 2). This process can take half a year to up to a year. The second level in the process is the *real* deradicalisation work which only starts after the first issues were taken care of and a relationship between the counsellor and the returnee was established. And this may take “one and a half, two years, sometimes two and a half years until the person opens up and the arrival here is possible, only then the real disengagement and deradicalisation work starts” (Interview 2). Another aspect that the interviewees agreed on was that every intervention or counselling is different which translates into the fact that the interventions need to be adapted to the specific case and situation.

6.2.3.2 Creation

Although the creation of the programs can be very different, it is mostly based on the needs that the organisation sees within the community and is in the end guided by the funding body. Overall, we see a practice that is in place for a decade and started when the first individuals joined the Islamic State and travelled to Syria and Iraq. Stemming from those experiences, specific organisations were created that exclusively dealt with jihadi extremists, while in other organisations, jihadi extremism was added as another venue next to projects focusing on right-wing extremism or other forms of political extremism. The focus of these projects for jihadi extremists was then the direct work with the extremists, work with the surrounding environment and educational projects to prevent radicalisation in the first place. Since the voluntary or organised return of FTFs to Germany started, working with them, their children and the supporting environment is another component of the projects.

6.2.3.3 Effectivity

Therefore, in 2023 civil-society organisations have a long practice working with jihadis which means that their employed methods are tested for a long time and could be adapted if necessary. However, a final result on the effectiveness of the programs is difficult to give by simply looking at the timeline. The returnees have not returned to Germany that long ago which means that they are barely able to have gone through the whole process of up to four years as described by the participants. The participants underlined, however, that looking at the effectiveness of their programs shows that steps in the right direction were taken. Through the counselling sessions, the individual develops a bigger sense of diversity within society which is a strong base for subsequent changes in the belief system. Moreover, the utopian notion of security services was rejected: „Are people really seriously deradicalised? Can you really deradicalise someone completely? That is perhaps also a fantasy of the security authorities. That clearly is impossible” (Interview 4).

6.2.3.4 Hurdles

The difficulties that practitioners experience in their program are on one hand the previously described difficulty to meet all expectations of the security services as well as of the returnees. In addition, it is a long process in which the outcome is solely influenced by the willingness of the returnee to partake in the process or not. This means that the organisation can only, until a certain limit, influence the outcome and therefore is met with difficulty here. Another aspect is the outcome that is wished for in the end. A shift in the mindset is the wished-for outcome of the deradicalisation intervention. However, the democratic character of countries such as Germany allows their citizens the free expression of their beliefs. This means an equilibrium has to be found between being able to live one’s own religion while not spreading propaganda and thereby undermining the democratic fundament of the country. Another aspect that was mentioned is the difficulty to create a relationship with the returnees which can then serve as the subset for the intervention. This is particularly difficult for the counsellors since, on the one hand, a relationship of trust is to be established and, on the other hand, there is the obligation to

pass on all potentially incriminating information mentioned in the meetings to the security services.

6.2.4 Female FTFs

To understand better the necessity for gender-sensitive deradicalisation practices, the situation of FTFs in light of their gender has to be analysed. While the situation of male fighters is the common narrative, women are oftentimes under- or misrepresented in the media. For this thesis, only the parts that directly involve the deradicalisation aspect are taken into account. By looking into the differences between male and female returnees and their similarities the two groups are mapped. In the second step, the difficulties in dealing with returnees are analysed before looking into the specific needs of women in the process.

6.2.4.1 Differences

When talking about the term FTFs in English, both men and women are subsumed under the term, which is not the case in German. Using the term IS-combatants in German implies that the individuals have engaged in actual combat, which means that the literal translation is not appropriate. Therefore, in the context of deradicalisation, the terms (former) IS-adherents or returnees are mostly used. This is already one indication of the differences between male and female IS members. Due to their different activities with the Islamic State, the response to them in Germany is very different. In addition, it must be underlined that very different cases exist within the group of female returnees and they have not had the same experiences, nor did they commit the same crimes. “I think the first step has just been taken. Namely, that women are taken seriously in their roles in extremism and terrorism.” (Interview 1). As a result, for a long time women were not charged at all or received lesser sentences than men. They were and are believed to be less dangerous due to less actual combat experience.

The most visible other difference is the returnees’ children. In most of the cases, women returned to Germany with one or several young children for which they were the sole responsible. “With the Islamic State but also in the

camps afterwards, the women were with their children. In other words, some of them have built up a very symbiotic relationship. The father is no longer there or has died. Maybe siblings have already died. So this mother-child relationship and also the relationship between the children is very strong“ (Interview 1). This influences the arrival of the returnees in Germany, as those women are preoccupied with the care of their children and first think about their well-being. The consequence of this is, however, „that they don't deal with themselves and reflect less. This often leads to depression or other problems at the end, especially after a year or a year and a half, when everything really comes to rest, and they suddenly have time to think about themselves” (Interview 3).

In the subsequent step, when the mother is charged and has to go to prison, the strong connection between mother and children can become especially difficult. The practitioners explained that specifically in the last years due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the interaction between the mothers and their children was very difficult, as the prisons were not adequately equipped to accommodate the children's needs. Acting as the primary caregiver, women are in most cases in need of a supportive environment as soon as they return which can help them with the children. However, this means that they will be or can be scrutinised more by their families due to their decision to join the Islamic State. Sometimes they are also encouraged into remarrying as a single woman with children is not a regular phenomenon in more traditional/religious backgrounds. In addition, because of their appearance, it is more difficult for women to reintegrate into society if they are devout Muslims, which means they are more likely to become victims of Islamophobia.

Another aspect that should not be neglected is the experience of violence during the time with the Islamic State and the subsequent trauma that the women are feeling. Some of them were forcibly married and were victims of rape. This requires specific attention within interventions and awareness within the overall process.

6.2.4.2 Similarities

Looking at the similarities between men and women, the participants mentioned that parts of both groups were highly ideological while others were not. They also had different motives why they joined the terrorist group, mainly religious convictions, dissatisfaction with the possibility of leading a religious life in Germany, and insecurity felt due to modern society where there were no spaces for a traditional/conservative life. Those topics are then subsequently the aspects that are analysed within the process of deradicalisation. Another topic that was mentioned is the reintegration within the workforce of both men and women. However, this can also be more difficult for women if they practice a version of Islam where they veil themselves and therefore face prejudice or Islamophobia.

6.2.4.3 Difficulties

When dealing with female returnees, the practitioners underlined that this already involves discussions about the situation as a woman and specific questions are posed in this direction. However, it is difficult for counsellors to distinguish between narratives that are simply a reproduction of a heard narrative and the returned person's own opinion. This happens both in interventions with men and women. In this context, the practitioners mentioned that getting access to women for talking about gender-specific issues is easier than doing it with men. Another obstacle when working with women is the sex of the practitioner, as details will likely not be shared if the practitioner is a man. The reasons given for this were the traditional social image of the individual and the often-intimate topics of the interactions, which focus, for example, on the body or the intimate experiences the person has had, which are associated with a sense of shame.

6.2.4.4 Needs

The specific needs of women in terms of deradicalisation are, on the one hand, a better understanding of the different roles they have played within the Islamic State and, on the other hand, that they are not only treated in their role as mothers. Also, it is important to show the women possibilities to live a pious life in modern society. Moreover, understanding the underlying wishes

and hopes that the person has, gives them the tools to feel empowered and take their life into their own hands. And lastly, the access to and connection with the children, especially in cases of a prison sentence, needs to be better handled to ensure a stable connection between mother and child.

6.2.5 Gender-sensitivity

One of the goals of this research is to engage more with the understanding of the gender-sensitivity of practitioners in the field. In order to do so the following sub-categories were introduced: the understanding of the concept, the creation of gender-sensitivity within deradicalisation, the potential thereof and lastly the impact that might be generated through gender-sensitive approaches.

6.2.5.1 Understanding

When engaging with the term gender-sensitive, none of the participants called their professional experiences gender-sensitive right away. However, throughout different questions in the interviews and after some form of dissection of the term, the participants agreed that their methods can be called gender sensitive. In their opinion, gender-sensitive means talking about the roles that men or women played in the Islamic State and looking at the way the person perceives themselves within the society as a man or a woman. This then also plays into the reasons for radicalisation or targeted recruitment based on the gender of the person.

6.2.5.2 Creation

„The more offers there are, the better it is and there should be special offers in the gender field, as well as integrated reflection and offers within those that already exist” (Interview 2). Therefore, potential new structures can be created, or the ones used/enlarged that are already in place. The goal should be that a broad offer exists which enables the returnee to decide for themselves which path they will follow. The development of these concepts needs to happen in civil society organisations. In addition, an overall understanding of gender-sensitivity needs to be instilled in every piece of the process. “But what

I think is important is that everyone has to participate, right down to the job centre” (Interview 4). Following this belief, the first step is the necessity to engage more with the topic at hand. “But I believe that this exchange, so to speak, is an extremely difficult cooperation task that has to be solved. That's why everyone must always be involved” (Interview 4). The idea about education or sensibility for the topic needs to be instilled also in the judicial field in order to create an appropriate trial situation, especially for women.

Apart from education, more practical steps can be taken within the interventions for which civil society organisations play the most important role. One approach is to develop certain questions that target the role of the individual within the Islamic State which is already a common feature in interventions for women. Gender-sensitivity also takes into account the specific situation of the individual, which in the case of women applies to their role as mothers. Therefore, ensuring access to the children and visiting hours when the mother is in prison or other forms of support outside the prison setting are essential.

6.2.5.3 Potential

It is difficult to assess the potential of gender-sensitive approaches, as they are a rather modern phenomenon. The participants, however, underlined that they are on a good path that is incomparable with the situation in which the approach to returnees was in 2018/2019. “I think the first step has just been taken. Namely, that women are taken seriously in their roles in extremism and terrorism. And the second step, what that means for exit counselling, for risk assessment, for the penal system, for rehabilitation, is only just beginning. We've been at it for a few years. That's not much time yet. There is still little research on this. It is generally difficult to do research in this area” (Interview 1).

6.2.5.4 Impact

Evaluating the impact of an ongoing project is always difficult. It proves even more difficult when the participants are not aware of certain specificities in the concept, such as gender-sensitivity. Therefore, no evaluation of the impact,

taking into account its gender-sensitivity is taking place. The participants express in the discussion that the actions speak for themselves. By this they mean that engaging with gender (stereotypes) can uncover aspects that were previously not seen which is why they should be more incorporated in the future.

6.2.6 Deradicalisation

Looking at the understanding of deradicalisation in German, used by both practitioners and researchers in this research, allows to understand the situation on the ground. Through consideration of the definitions used and the concepts and methods employed, the final step of the analysis focuses on possible gender-specific deradicalisation. This was not only the final part of the interview questions, but it also builds up on the previously received information.

6.2.6.1 Definition

In German, terms that are employed to engage with the topic are disengagement (*Distanzierung*) and/or deradicalisation (*Deradikalisierung*) both were mentioned within the interviews. While some participants used those terms interchangeably, others draw a clear line. Disengagement was described as the first step in which an individual leaves the extremist group, whereas deradicalisation is a change in the emotional and cognitive system of the individual. Talking about returnees, therefore, implies that one step in the sense of disengagement is already done. Therefore, the deradicalisation process is a further step which, as previously mentioned, can take several years. A “real deradicalised” individual is questionable, but still, this is the goal that the civil society projects are trying to reach.

6.2.6.2 Concepts/Methods

The methods that civil society organisations are employing mostly try to focus on the aspect of a change in the belief system of the person. This can then be counted as deradicalisation. Therefore, what was extensively presented in 5.2 *Methods* is only summarised here quickly. Mostly systemic analysis is used that takes into account the surroundings/environment of the person. Through

targeted interventions in the form of individualised sessions with the returnees, a possible venue is looked for in which (if wanted) religious belief can be combined with democratic principles.

6.2.6.3 Situation

Looking at the situation of deradicalisation it has to be said that the participants were content with the current situation. This means that some participants preferred to talk about disengagement over deradicalisation in order not to follow the utopian idea that a person can be successfully deradicalised after certain steps have been taken. It can be said that civil-society organisations work with individuals for a longer period of time without the goal of deradicalisation in the end but rather of a shift in mindset. One practitioner put the difference as the following, “as a civil society actor I cannot take responsibility. I may have skills in psychological support and in understanding ideologies. But I will never certify that someone is deradicalised and I will never want to decide alone about people's future” (Interview 5). Therefore, deradicalisation is a wish of the security services which is executed by civil society organisations that are calling it differently.

6.2.6.4 Gender-sensitivity

The goal of this thesis is to come up with an understanding of gender-sensitive deradicalisation and to see whether it is already taking place in Germany. Previously the understanding of the different actors about gender-sensitivity was already presented. Now a clearer picture will be drawn when it comes to deradicalisation methods that specifically take into account the gender of the person. As it was previously explained, talking about gender is more than talking about women. One participant put it like this: „We have focused on men, for all those years, now we should not make the mistake of focusing only on women. Instead, we must consider how we can address this interplay, especially with regard to gender roles, the attractiveness of these gender roles and the complementarity of these gender roles. This is what we should think about and then use it for deradicalisation work and also in research on the topic” (Interview 4).

Looking at the radicalisation process of extremists, several venues for intervention with a gender-specific narrative are possible. Specific questions that aim at the role of the person as a woman or a man within the group could be asked. Therefore, creating an understanding of the wishes and needs of the person. The goal of gender-sensitive approaches is not only to reveal the belief system of those people but to show the returnee different venues for the future. This means explaining how to be a religious person in Germany or in the case of the women that joined the so-called Islamic State, how to navigate modern society when one has a more conservative mindset. Also, the ways in which the intervention takes place can be approached differently to be more adequate for different people, this means e.g. to have a mixed or all-female set of practitioners in order for the returnees to feel more comfortable to share intimate information.

The practitioners have all agreed that in one way or another, reflections on the role of women already are an important characteristic within the interventions. Their role, however, is not one only of child-rearing mothers but can have several facets to it. Furthermore, one person's situation is not comparable to the situation of another person. In order to sharpen the understanding of those aspects, more educational work is necessary in different fields. This is equally important in every step of the return of the individuals such as engaging with the child protection services or when it comes to trials for which judges are educated in advance about the different roles and situations in which people were active in the Islamic State. Another factor which is especially important for women in deradicalisation is their connection/relationship with the children. Especially in the prison setting, the situation needs to be equipped better to host women as well as their children or to ensure child-friendly settings for visits.

However, when talking about gender-sensitivity within deradicalisation the practitioners also mentioned some points that needed to be taken into account. Those are, e.g. the setting of the interventions and also the narrative that the practitioners have. "As counsellors in this field of work, we always have to take into account our prejudices, as we also tend to see gender as the

explanation in a lot of cases. [...] And there, of course, it is important to be careful that one does not turn a gender-sensitive approach into an approach of, so to speak, prejudice about gender aspects.” (Interview 6).

7. Gender-sensitive Deradicalisation of FTFs in Germany

In the following section, the literature findings are presented. Afterwards, the information gathered within the interviews as well as through the analysis of the state document will be presented with a focus on the most tangible results before they are discussed in order to answer the research question.

7.1 Gender-sensitive Deradicalisation Techniques (literature findings)

As the literature findings about gender-sensitive deradicalisation form the basis for this research, a summary thereof is now presented, as it will subsequently guide the answering of the research question. When engaging with the topic it becomes clear that researchers have started in the last ten years to focus more on specific deradicalisation techniques for women or overall gender-sensitive deradicalisation. Those were extensively presented in section 3.4 *Gender-sensitive deradicalisation*. Overall, six different areas are mentioned in which specific interventions for women are necessary. All those are interrelated and no clear starting point for the intervention can be specified as they all depend on one another and can be exhibited to a different extent in different people, as shown in the form of a cycle in the illustration below.

The areas are as follows health, with a specific emphasis on mental and physical health, as well as trauma interventions. The mindset with interventions focussing on counter-narratives and specific stereotypes and cooperation for the trauma interventions. Targeted programs specifically look at female

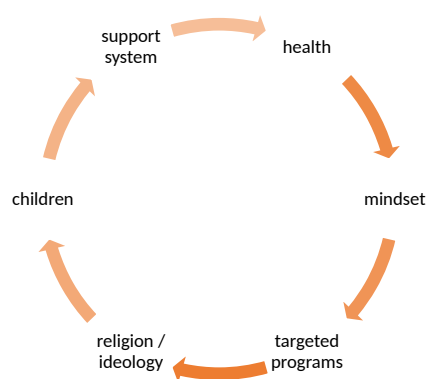


Illustration 2: The Six areas of intervention for women in the deradicalisation process (own illustration)

radicalisation and try to find learnings in this. They also focus on the establishment of counter-narratives and the targeting of stereotypes. They help especially in finding substitute programs for the lost (online) community in which people shared the same ideology. Those are supposed to help specifically with questions of how to navigate modern society which stigmatises the traditional style of life. Looking more at the religion or ideology of the woman, all the previously mentioned steps are used for the deradicalisation process in this area. On the one hand, it becomes clear that children are a sensitive issue that needs to be dealt with adequately. On the other hand, it is emphasised that the relationship between child and parents must be supported. However, if a woman is returning with children from the so-called Islamic State and she is prosecuted in her country of origin, a social support system is especially important for the woman to help take care of the children, or to become in charge of them in case of a prison sentence.

Several different actors must become active in order to ensure a more gender-sensitive deradicalisation which are the returnee, the counsellor(s), the family, the authorities and the overall society. Since a gender-sensitive approach to deradicalisation requires a combined effort of the different actors without a clear starting or ending point, the illustration on the right is in the form of a cycle.

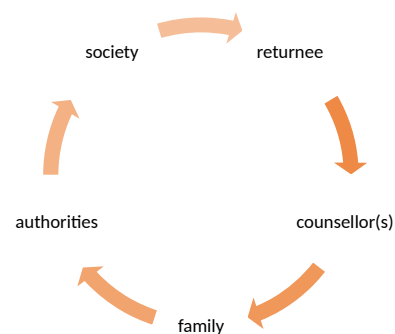


Illustration 3: Actors in gender-sensitive deradicalisation process (own illustration)

7.2 Overview of the Research Findings

The goal of the thesis was to analyse a subsequent step of the return of FTFs, namely the so-called deradicalisation of the individuals. For this, the following research question was established: *To what extent does the neglect of a gender perspective as an important aspect of deradicalisation efforts determine German policies on the reintegration of female foreign terrorist fighters?* To answer the question, semi-structured interviews with German civil society organisations, state employees and academics were conducted. Afterwards, the

analysis was guided by a deductive approach in which the following categories were established: *actors*, *state documents/guidelines*, *female FTFs*, *methods*, *gender-sensitivity* and lastly *deradicalisation*. In the following, the findings within the research will be presented in a comprehensive fashion and the research question will be answered.

Looking at the field of deradicalisation in Germany, it becomes clear that various actors are active in this field in Germany, which is why Baaken *et. al.* (2018) refer to it as the hybrid model. Therewithin the security sector and the civil society actors have to be named as the biggest actors, but they differ from state to state. Especially the introduction of the so-called “return coordinator” who facilitates the interaction between the different actors has to be emphasised. Analysing the influence of the different actors, the various time frames of interaction with the returnees, and intervention settings have to be taken into account. It becomes clear that the overall deradicalisation process takes several years of which civil-society actors spend the most time with the returnees and are therefore able to steer those developments most clearly. In addition, the security services and state actors are the first responders which puts them in a specific position. In summary, there is a fruitful coexistence of the different actors, which is of great importance in this particular area. The high number of involved actors, however, deserves special attention when looking at potential gender-sensitive approaches which will be dealt with in a subsequent section.

The focus of the next section is on addressing the idea of the German policy on deradicalisation, as it was referred to in the question under investigation. The official document that was presented to civil society organisations as well as the security sector in 2019 by the Conference of the Ministers of the Interior named *Report of the Federal Ministry of the Interior on "Dealing with returnees from the jihadist combat zones, especially Syria and Iraq" Guidelines for dealing holistically with returnees* was analysed previously and was also part of the interview sessions. It gives an overview of the official German guidelines when it comes to dealing with returnees and was perceived by the participants as a document that is supposed to guide actors that are new

in the field, but not the experienced practitioners that were part of the research. They also added that the document is called guidelines and not strategy on purpose, as no such strategy exists in Germany, neither for the deradicalisation process nor for preventing or countering extremism in Germany generally. This understanding is important for answering the research question, as the goal was to look into *the German strategy for deradicalisation*. It becomes clear that no one German policy exists and that the previously discussed guidelines cannot be viewed as a strict strategy that has to be obeyed.

Through the study of the topic of female FTFs, specific needs and difficulties for this group were found. Firstly, looking at the definition that is employed in German for this group, it becomes clear that the literal translation of the term FTF is not appropriate. While the women were part of the Islamic State in countries like Syria or Iraq, they were called IS supporters. After their return, they are usually referred to as returnees. In the German case, which can largely be transferred to other countries, there are the following particularities of female returnees: The belief that women were less dangerous due to less combat experience resulted in lesser court sentences. Heinke and Raudszus (2018) analysed the situation of FTFs in Germany where they found that until December 2017 women were judged more leniently than men due to gender biases when it came to women's participation in the Islamic State (2018: 50). Another prominent factor of difference between male and female returnees are the children that most female returnees returned with. It is a specific situation in the case of the Islamic State in which mother and child were, for several years, the sole focus of each other, which created a symbiotic relationship. The practitioners especially underlined this aspect due to its difficulty in the subsequent process, e.g. if the returnee has to go to prison, which can be a traumatic experience for the mother as well as for the children. For some of those women, the return to Germany can trigger negative consequences such as Islamophobia if they keep on practising their religion visibly. The individual circumstances are highly important in those cases and to think of men or women that joined the Islamic State as a homogenous group is wrong. For both groups, the wish to join the Islamic State stems from the difficulty to navigate modern society and their religious life therewithin. What practitioners stressed as specific needs were first, to create an understanding of how to be a

56

religious person within modern society, and second to empower the men and women within this situation. And lastly to ensure continued access/connection with the children. Due to the highly individual situation of the people that joined the Islamic State, they cannot be treated all with the same approaches to work on deradicalisation. Research looking specifically at female IS returnees helped overcome previously held stereotypes.

After having established the specificities of female returnees, the next step in the analysis was to engage more with the methods that are already in place for returnees. For this question, the civil society organisations shared their experiences and explained how their employed methods work. The focus of this section was on methods for deradicalisation work. As previously described, civil society organisations are working with the individual for a far longer time which makes them the principles agents for this specific aspect. A systemic approach is used by several organisations which means also taking into account the system (individual, family, society, ...) of the returnee. The steps in the process then are the following: First is the pragmatic step in which questions that come up immediately after the return are answered. The deradicalisation process is the second step which can take two to two and a half years. Through year-long experiences, the methods were constantly updated to be appropriate for the specific situation of the returnees. The effectiveness of the programs cannot finally be judged because on the one hand, a person can probably never be called completely deradicalised, and on the other hand, they are still in the middle of the process which means that the outcome cannot be judged yet. Another difficulty that the practitioners explained is the final goal of the intervention. This means mindset change and simultaneously the possibility for the person to still be able to practice their religion. Therefore, it can be said that over the process of the last years civil society organisations have gained more experience working with returnees and specifically with women which is a positive pretext for the subsequent steps. However, the overall difficulties in the process, especially when it comes to the controversial topic of deradicalisation will not be made easier through the introduction of gender-specific components.

Some hesitancy around the concept “gender-sensitivity” existed while the approaches that the practitioners currently use can be described as gender-sensitive. Challenging this with the definition of gender that was presented previously (Gender as a social construct which creates expectations of “being a man” or being a woman”) goes in line with what was described by the participants. The understanding of gender-sensitivity within the current practices is surrounding ideas about roles in the Islamic State, questioning the own perception of the standing within society, and lastly engaging with reasons for radicalisation and targeted recruitment based on gender. Talking more about the creation of gender-sensitive programs it became clear that those can be anchored within already existing offers. Or new projects can be created which are only working gender-sensitively. The practitioners agreed that the more projects the better for the subsequent targeted deradicalisation of individuals. While the interventions need to be established within civil-society organisations a change in the belief system of the overall system is necessary to be able to see gender everywhere and therefore react appropriately. More practically, men (if they are repatriated in the future) and women need to be asked about their understanding of roles within the Islamic State and the implications thereof. Lastly, it has to be said that only the first steps were taken in regard to gender-sensitivity. Using gender-appropriate settings and gender-sensitive deradicalisation allows to see aspects differently or brings situations to the fore that were previously not seen.

Finally, engaging with the topic of deradicalisation, allows to tackle the question of a potential gender-sensitive deradicalisation. Starting from the terms that are used in German. While in some cases clear distinctions were made between disengagement and deradicalisation they were not in others. The participants’ views are in line with the previously introduced understanding in the literature review. Overall, deradicalisation is the correct concept to analyse in this context as the spotlight is mostly on long-term changes in the belief system of the returnees. Considering the impossibility to create a completely deradicalised individual in the eyes of civil society organisations only underlines their complete understanding of the process. As they are navigating it daily and therefore have a much more realistic

perspective of what is possible and what is not, compared to the goal of state institutions. Creating an individualised intervention for every returnee supports the process in the best way possible. The outcome is the ability of the returnee to practice their religion (if wanted) while also navigating modern society. Being content with the current situation of deradicalisation in Germany, the goal of civil society organisations is to create a mindset change and not to attach the term “deradicalised” to a person which is a utopian idea introduced by security services. Lastly, engaging with the concept of gender-sensitivity in deradicalisation the participants agreed that gender should be incorporated more clearly in the interventions of civil-society. They also underline, however, that this is not where it should end. It should rather be a combined effort of all the actors involved. Finally, some reservations were expressed, such as the reflexivity of the counsellor and the possible repercussions that can arise when gender is seen as the main explanation for everything.

7.3 German Situation of Gender-sensitive Deradicalisation

Having given the overview of the outcomes within this research the next step is to answer the research question: *To what extent does the neglect of a gender perspective as an important aspect of deradicalisation efforts determine German policies on the reintegration of female foreign terrorist fighters?* The question was dissected in different aspects to engage with it holistically. First, the analysis of deradicalisation, second, gender-sensitivity in the field, third, the topic of female foreign terrorist fighters, and overall, everything was analysed by looking at the empirical case of Germany.

According to the interviews with practitioners on the ground, women are already seen as part of the interventions and there are specific discussions about the role of women within the so-called Islamic State. As it is not possible to look into the future and anticipate the German strategy for the return of male FTFs, it remains unclear what the intervention with men (on a larger scale than what is already taking place) would look like. Still, while we cannot talk about a strategy in the case of Germany, we can look at the guidelines that were introduced in 2019 and conclude that a gender-sensitive component is lacking completely. And even though the document is not

regarded as important by actors active in the deradicalisation field, it still is the only official guideline that exists. And if it is really supposed to guide new actors in the field, they also need to be made aware of gender within this discussion. As of 2019, studies on women in the Islamic State have advanced greatly, so it is important to include this information in guidelines to guide targeted actions for each returnee. Not mentioning the specific case of women can be attributed to the time of the creation, but it is not appropriate in the current situation and with the current knowledge.

In addition, practitioners underline that it was far more difficult to engage with men in discussions about masculinity. This is a necessary step, however, in order to undermine the attraction that the Islamic State has on both men and women. The goal should be to employ an intervention which sees the gender of the person and also makes the person see their own gender. This translates into discussions about masculinity and femininity, about (traditional) roles and how to navigate modern society. During the interviews, it was underlined that discussing their roles and the topic of femininity came rather naturally to the women. Therefore, we cannot talk about neglect in interventions, but neglect in terminology when it comes to targeted interventions. Employing a gender-sensitive terminology is significant for the realisation and creation of future interventions which might then target children or men specifically. The idea of a gender-sensitive overall strategy at federal and/or state level is at odds with the German hybrid model. This means that no one strategy can be created which has to be followed by everyone. This however gives flexibility in the interventions that the different civil society organisations employ and will make it easier to put a focus on gender-sensitivity. In addition, a strategy is always a child of its time and at the point of issuing it is already old. Germany has a long experience of deradicalisation efforts (especially in the case of right-wing extremism) and therefore accumulated vast knowledge on the topic. In addition, a number of civil-society organisations are working on the topic of jihadism for more than ten years now. This means that the practices and interventions that were created are not only based on vast knowledge but also experience. Putting more emphasis on a gender-sensitive approach and employing this terminology will not only make the interventions more targeted

but underline the German achievements. Therefore, it has to be said that, first no one German policy for the deradicalisation of FTFs exists, and second, that gender already is part of the interventions that are underway in Germany. This means that gender-sensitive practices are not neglected but they are not presented as such, which means a neglect in terminology. But only the first step was made in the right direction to create appropriate deradicalisation techniques for everyone. The difficulty is now to go the extra mile and really incorporate gender at every step of the way. This however is difficult to come by as it would mean a mind shift in the whole (patriarchal) society.

Looking at the literature on female deradicalisation, a number of points could be seen that need to be taken into account specifically for the deradicalisation of women which can then lead to gender-sensitive deradicalisation. A feminist approach to the topic has shown that gender and gender stereotypes can be made visible when they are put at the centre of the analysis. This however translates into a blurred picture of reality if either not all necessary aspects are portrayed correctly and/or are not named clearly. Looking at the German case compared to the findings within the literature on female deradicalisation, it is clear that Germany is already active in all six fields that could be dissected from the literature when especially engaging with women: health, mindset, targeted programs, religion/ideology, children and support system due to the specific programs that counselling centres or specific counsellors are doing. In addition, since the revision of the system in 2017, Germany is actively prosecuting women, which means that women are treated as perpetrators of violence while also taking into account their potential status as victims in the overall situation. However, there is still a lack of activity when it comes to other venues of action. This points especially to other involved groups in the process such as the authorities or wider society. Information campaigns for a broader audience are still missing. Basic information about the roles of women within IS and Islam, in general, is lacking. In addition, it can be learned from this approach that Germany should share its approach more widely, for example within European frameworks by naming it correctly as interventions specifically for women or gender-sensitive interventions. This can again be attributed to the previously mentioned problem—neglect of terminology—and

not practice. The next, more difficult step in this process is the creation of gender-sensitive deradicalisation. When men are repatriated in the future, the experiences gained in recent years, which specifically take into account the gender of the person in the deradicalisation process, should not be forgotten but rather adapted to each individual case.

7.4 Policy Recommendations for Gender-sensitive Deradicalisation

In the case of Germany, formulating policy recommendations always comes with a challenge as the recipients for those differ from federal state to federal state. However, as outlined in this analysis, there are specific guidelines for certain topics, which are then disseminated to a wider audience. Looking at the information that already exists on deradicalisation specifically done for women from the literature and from the empirical findings in Germany, the following three areas of intervention were identified:

1. *Counselling* within the setting of civil-society interventions.
2. Increased awareness of the *society* for the topic at hand.
3. Strategic and thorough training of necessary *authorities* for the specific topic.

In those areas of intervention, the following recommendations need to be applied. The recommendations follow the information gathered within this research and point at the short-comings established previously:

1. The creation of specific and compulsory **seminars** on the role of women in the Islamic state, especially for authority figures as well as potential new players in the field of radicalisation and deradicalisation to limit the further spread of stereotypical depictions. This should reach all relevant actors from lawyers to social workers to members of the foreign office.
2. Ensure the access of returning FTFs to targeted **interventions** that take into account the gender of the person, and further support the creation of those. A first step towards this is that civil society organisations are sensitised to the issue of gender sensitivity. This will make them more aware of their own actions in interventions. In addition, an update of the guidelines for the deradicalisation of IS returnees will be prepared.

3. Create models for incarcerated (female) IS-returnees and their **children** to ensure a stable relationship through child-friendly settings in the prisons, for example adapted visiting hours or free time periods (in open prison settings) matched with the children's schedule.
4. Raising **awareness** of Islamophobia and the accompanying social stigma while underpinning Germany's approach to diversity, which ranges from conservative to modern views. Through increased accessibility and visibility of German-wide campaigns such as "Demokratie Leben"³ improvements can be made.
5. Finding an **equilibrium** between seeing women as victims and perpetrators of violence in both radicalisation and deradicalisation processes. This means taking specific care of women based on their potential (sexual) traumatic experiences while also bringing their cases to court and prosecuting it accordingly. This requires the assistance of trauma experts at every step of the way.
6. Taking gender into account in the **risk analysis** of IS returnees and making sure that a comparable system is used in the different German federal states in order to ensure evaluation in the long run.
7. Underlining that gender-sensitivity is not only targeting women which means that the findings and developments that were made for female IS returnees should not be forgotten when dealing with the potential return of male FTFs in the future. This can be ensured through the creation of **gender-sensitive deradicalisation techniques** in the first place and not only targeting women with those.

8. Conclusion

In this thesis I set out to analyse the deradicalisation efforts in Germany for their gender-sensitivity which was a difficult undertaking given the German situation on the ground, the accessibility to research participants and lastly the overall topic. As outlined earlier, the majority of literature in the field of radicalisation and deradicalisation focuses on radicalisation and then mostly looks at men. This is understandable considering the majority of violent extremists are men. However, especially with the example of the Islamic State,

³ <https://www.demokratie-leben.de/>

the vital role of women within the organisation cannot be denied. And even though in the last years women have become the subjects of studies more and more, they are still underrepresented in the field of security studies. The goal of this research was to tip the balance and increase awareness about a topic which needs gender-specific treatment to increase its effectiveness.

Throughout the research a number of observations were made which are presented in the following: first, the complexity of the German deradicalisation system which is being further complicated by the federal character of Germany. Second, the limits to country-wide guidelines and the creation thereof. Third, the progressive nature of existing programmes in Germany in the field of deradicalisation. Fourth, the hesitancy to call a program gender-sensitive and the sometimes-lacking awareness about the term itself. Those findings underline the necessity to conduct research such as the one at the centre of this thesis. Overall, it became clear that German practitioners are only to a certain extent aware of gender-sensitivity in the field of deradicalisation but they do not employ the right terminology. And not employing the right terminology means that only limited awareness about the topic exists which furthermore influences the creation of targeted programs in the future. In addition, looking at the information that is coming from the official site, an approach that takes into account the gender of the person is still missing.

Moving on, the policy recommendations that were presented in the last section all have in common that they underline the strong basis that already exists in Germany. However, it would need more effort in order to ensure adequate preparation for the potential return of male FTFs. Looking again at the German national security report, both male and female returnees were named as a threat to Germany as a whole which underlines the necessity to keep engaging with the topic on a larger scale. The constitutional protection report adds in this context that the group of returnees is very heterogenic, in which people that were ideologically indoctrinated pose the biggest security threat for Germany (BMI, 2023: 194). Keeping this information in mind underlines

the necessity for tailor-made and gender-sensitive approaches to the deradicalisation of IS returnees.

Despite several significant results of this research, a number of questions remained unanswered. These could be the basis for further study in this field. Having focused on Germany, the comparison of the information found in this research with similar scope in another country would create new and valuable findings. Potential countries that could be studied are other European countries such as France or the UK. In addition, shedding the focus also on countries such as Indonesia or African countries that are battling Boko Haram or al-Shabaab such as Nigeria or Somalia. The focus of this research was on jihadism and did not engage heavily with other forms of violent extremism. Therefore, it would be interesting to look at practices of deradicalisation e.g., in right-wing extremism. This will prove difficult, however, given the small numbers of women active in right-wing extremism, mirrored in the small numbers subsequently participating in deradicalisation programs. Shifting the focus to another group which was only barely touched upon within this thesis is the question of the returning children of IS adherents. In practice, this would mean engaging with an even more nuanced approach to deradicalisation, looking especially at girls and boys and their upbringing within IS and subsequently the implementation of gender within the interventions for them. The children that were born within the so-called caliphate had to follow rigid gender norms from the beginning which need to be assessed and processed after the return to the country of origin. Another aspect which still needs to be studied is the potential connection between gender-sensitive interventions and the effective deradicalisation of women. To do this, however, data that is publicly unavailable is necessary. This goes hand in hand with the overall possibility of conducting an evaluation of gender-sensitive programs in subsequent research based on their effectiveness.

Bibliography

Abbas, T. (2021) *Countering Violent Extremism: The International Deradicalization Agenda*, London: I. B. Tauris & Company.

Ali, F. (2006) "Rocking the Cradle to Rocking the World: The Role of Muslim Female Fighters," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 8(1), pp. 21-35.

Almohammad, A. H. and Speckhard, A. (2017) *The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers*. Washington: International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism.

Baaken, T. et al. (2020) "Dissecting Deradicalization: Challenges for Theory and Practice in Germany," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence (IJCV)*, 14(2), pp. 1-18.

Baaken, T. et al. (2018) Herausforderung Deradikalisierung: Einsichten aus Wissenschaft und Praxis, (PRIF Reports, 9), Frankfurt am Main: Hessische Stiftung Friedens- und Konfliktforschung. Available at: https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/59479/ssoar-2018-baaken_et_al-Herausforderung_Deradikalisierung_Einsichten_aus_Wissenschaft.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&lnkname=ssoar-2018-baaken_et_al-Herausforderung_Deradikalisierung_Einsichten_aus_Wissenschaft.pdf (Accessed on 18.07.2023).

Barrelle, K. (2014) "Pro-integration: Disengagement from and Life after extremism," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 7(2), pp. 129-142.

Beetham, G. and Demetriades, J. (2007) "Feminist research methodologies and development: overview and practical application," *Gender & Development*, 15(2), pp. 199-216.

Bjørge, T. (1997) *Racist and right-wing violence in Scandinavia: Patterns, perpetrators and responses*. Oslo: Tano Aschehoug.

BKA, BfV and HKE (2016) *Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind*. Wiesbaden: Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz and Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus. Available at: https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Publikationen/Publikationsreihen/Forschungsergebnisse/2016AnalyseRadikalisierungsgruendeSyrienIrakAusreisende.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4 (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

Bloom, M. (2005) "Mother. Daughter. Sister bomber.," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 61(6), pp. 54-62.

Bloom, M. and Lokmanoglu, A. (2020) "From pawn to knights: The changing role of women's agency in terrorism?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 46(4), pp. 1-16.

Bodziany, M. and Netczuk-Gwoździwicz, M. (2021) "Feminization of Terror: Psychological Analysis of the Role of Women in Terrorist Structures," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 44(3), pp. 266-283.

Bogner, A., Littig, B. and Menz, W. (2014) *Interview mit Experten, Eine praxisorientierte Einführung*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien.

Botha, S. (2021) "The women and girls associated with Boko Haram: How has the Nigerian government responded?," *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 28(2), pp. 263-284.

Brown, K. (2021) Gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations: insights for practitioners, RAN Expert Paper, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Brugh, C.S. *et al.* (2019) "Gender in the jihad: Characteristics and outcomes among women and men involved in jihadism-inspired terrorism.," *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 6(2), pp. 76-92.

Bubolz, B.F. and Simi, P. (2015) "Leaving the World of Hate: Life-Course Transitions and Self-Change," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 59(12), pp. 1588-1608.

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF) (2021) *Deradikalisierungs- und Distanzierungsarbeit. Begleitbuch zum Qualifizierungslehrgang (Umfeld-) Beratung im Phänomenbereich islamistisch begründeter Extremismus. Beiträge zu Migration und Integration*, Band 9, Nürnberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge.

Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (2023) *Verfassungsschutzbericht*. Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat. Available at: https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/themen/sicherheit/vsb2022-BMI23007.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3 (Accessed on 18.07.2023).

Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat (2019) *Bericht des BMI zum Thema „Umgang mit Rückkehrern aus den jihadistischen Kampfgebieten, insbesondere Syrien und Irak“*. Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat.

Byman, D. (2016) "Understanding the Islamic State. A Review Essay," *International Security*, 40(4), pp. 127-165.

Byman, D. and Shapiro, J. (2014) *Be Afraid. Be A Little Afraid: The Threat of Terrorism from Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings.

Chowdhury, R. (2004) *Martyrdom and Jihad, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2004/03/01/martyrdom-and-jihad-event-684> (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

Clutterbuck, L. (2015) *Deradicalization programs and counterterrorism: A perspective on the challenges and benefits*, Middle East Institute. Available at: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/deradicalization-programs-and-counterterrorism-perspective-challenges-and-benefits> (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

Connell, R. (2021) *Gender: In world perspective*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Cook, D. (2005) "Women fighting in jihad?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 28(5), pp. 375–384.

Cook, J.A. and Fonow, M.M. (1986) "Knowledge and Women's Interests: Issues of Epistemology and Methodology in Feminist Sociological Research," *Sociological Inquiry*, 56(1), pp. 2-29.

Cook, J. and Vale, G. (2018) *From Daesh to 'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State*. London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation. Available at: <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-From-Daesh-to-%E2%80%98Diaspora%E2%80%99-Tracing-the-Women-and-Minors-of-Islamic-State.pdf> (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

Cook, J. and Vale, G. (2019) "From Daesh to 'Diaspora' II: The Challenges Posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate," *CTC Sentinel*, 12(6), pp. 30-45.

Cunningham, K.J. (2003) "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 26(3), pp. 171-195.

Davis, J. (2020) *The future of the Islamic State's Women: assessing their potential threat*, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Doosje, B. *et al.* (2016) "Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization," *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 11, pp. 79-84.

Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (2017) *Jihadist women, a threat not to be underestimated*. The Hague: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. Available at: <https://english.aivd.nl/binaries/aivd-en/documenten/publications/2017/12/14/publication-jihadist-women-a-threat-not-to-be-underestimated/Jihadist+women%2C+a+threat+not+to+be+underestimated.pdf> (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

EUROPOL (2022) *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Federal Foreign Office (2023) *Robust. Resilient. Sustainable. Integrated Security for Germany, National Security Strategy*. Berlin: Federal Foreign Office. Available at: <https://www.nationalesicherheitsstrategie.de/National-Security-Strategy-EN.pdf> (Accessed: 18.07.2023)

Gerring, J. (2004) What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for? *American Political Science Review*, 98(2), pp. 341-354.

Gielen, A.-J. (2018) “Exit programmes for female jihadists: A proposal for conducting realistic evaluation of the Dutch approach,” *International Sociology*, 33(4), pp. 454-472.

Glaser, M. (2017) ‘Disengagement and Deradicalization Work with Girls and Young Women—Experiences from Germany’, in M. Köttig, R. Bitzan and A. Petö (eds.) *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 337-349.

Harding, S. and Norberg, K. (2005) “New Feminist Approaches to Social Science Methodologies: An Introduction,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(4), pp. 2009-2015.

Hegghammer, T. (2010) “The rise of Muslim foreign fighters: Islam and the globalization of Jihad,” *International Security*, 35(3), pp. 53-94.

Heinke, D. H. and Raudszus, J. (2018) “Germany’s Returning Foreign Fighters and What to Do About Them,” in Renard, T. and Coolsaet, R. (eds.) *Returnees: Who are They, why are They (not) coming back and how should we deal with them? Assessing Policies on Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands*, Brussels: Egmont Papers.

Horgan, J. (2009a) “Deradicalization or disengagement? A process in need of clarity and a counterterrorism initiative in need of evaluation,” *Revista de Psicología Social*, 24(2), pp. 291-298.

Horgan, J. (2009) “Individual Disengagement: A Psychological Analysis,” in T. Bjørgo and J. Horgan (eds) *Leaving terrorism behind individual and collective disengagement*. London: Routledge, pp. 17-29.

Horgan, J. and Braddock, K. (2010) “Rehabilitating the terrorists?: Challenges in assessing the effectiveness of de-radicalization programs,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22(2), pp. 267-291.

Horgan, J. *et al.* (2017) “Walking away: The disengagement and de-radicalization of a violent right-wing extremist,” *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 9(2), pp. 63-77.

Hoyle, C., Bradford, A. and Frenett, R. (2015) *Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS*. London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue. Available at:

https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ISDJ2969_Becoming_Mulan_01.15_WEB.pdf (Accessed 18.07.2023).

ICAN and UNDP (2019) *Invisible women: Gendered Dimensions of Return, Rehabilitation and Reintegration from Violent Extremism*. New York: United Nations Development Programme. Available at: <https://icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ICAN-UNDP-Rehabilitation-Reintegration-Invisible-Women-Report-2019.pdf> (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

Ingram, H.J. *et al.* (2020) ‘Women in the Islamic State’, in *The ISIS reader: Milestone texts of the Islamic State Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 199-214.

Koehler, D. (2017) *Understanding deradicalization: Methods, tools and programs for Countering Violent Extremism*. London: Routledge.

Koller, S. and Schiele, A. (2021) “Holding Women Accountable: Prosecuting Female Returnees in Germany,” *CTC Sentinel*, 14(10), pp. 38-50.

Lahoud, N. (2014) “The neglected sex: The jihadis’ exclusion of women from Jihad,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26(5), pp. 780-802.

Lahoud, N. (2018) *Empowerment or Subjugation: A Gendered Analysis of ISIL Messaging*. Cairo: UN Women. Available at: <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Arab%20States/Attachments/Publications/Lahoud-Fin-Web-rev.pdf> (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

Levy, J.S. (2008) “Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 25(1), pp. 1-18.

Malet, D. (2010) “Why foreign fighters? Historical Perspectives and Solutions,” *Orbis*, pp. 97-114.

Makanda, J. (2019) “The Jihad Feminist Dynamics of Terrorism and Subordination of Women in the ISIS,” *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 8(2), pp. 135-159.

Marsden, S.V. (2017) *Reintegrating extremists deradicalisation and desistance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Mayring, P. (2015) ‘Qualitative Content Analysis: Theoretical Background and Procedures’, in A. Bikner-Ahsbabs, C. Knipping, and N. Presmeg (eds.) *Approaches to qualitative research in mathematics education examples of methodology and methods*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 365-380.

Mendelsohn, B. (2011) “Foreign fighters—recent trends,” *Orbis*, 55(2), pp. 189-202.

Ní Aoláin, F. and Huckerby, J. (2018) *Gendering counterterrorism: How to, and how not to - part II, Just Security*. Available at: <https://www.justsecurity.org/55670/gendering-counterterrorism-to-part-ii/> (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

Ortbals, C.D. and Poloni-Staudinger, L.M. (2018) *Gender and Political Violence. Women Changing the Politics of Terrorism*. Cham: Springer.

Pearson, E. (2015) "The case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for theory on online radicalization, ISIS women, and the Gendered Jihad," *Policy & Internet*, 8(1), pp. 5-33.

Pearson, E. (2018) *Why Men Fight and Women Don't: Masculinity and Extremist Violence*, London: Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. Available at: <https://assets.ctfassets.net/751a1c9taeh/01EWeLoZvaeydHRGJaGbR6/511d5d286472ecbcc7847b2f8a4848ea/Why-Men-Fight-and-Women-Don-t-Masculinity-and-Extremist-Violence-.pdf> (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

Perešin, A. (2018) "Why women from the West are joining ISIS," *International Annals of Criminology*, 56(1-2), pp. 32-42.

Perešin, A. (2019) "The Role of Women in Post-IS Jihadist Transformation and in Countering Extremism," in Pektaş Şerafettin (ed.) *Militant jihadism: Today and Tomorrow*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, pp. 101-121.

Perešin, A. and Cervone, A. (2015) "The Western *Muhajirat* of ISIS," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38(7), pp. 495-509.

Phelan, A. (2020) "Special Issue Introduction for Terrorism, Gender and Women: Toward an Integrated Research Agenda," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 46(4), pp. 353-361.

Redaktion Infodienst Radikalisierungsprävention (2022) *Zahlen zur Islamistischen Szene in Deutschland*, bpb.de. Available at: <https://www.bpb.de/themen/infodienst/337749/zahlen-zur-islamistischen-szene-in-deutschland/> (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

Reynolds, S.C. and Hafez, M.M. (2017) "Social network analysis of German foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 31(4), pp. 661-686.

Schmid, A. P. and Tinnes, J. (2015) *Foreign (Terrorist) Fighters with IS: A European Perspective*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Schmidt, R. (2022) "Duped: Examining Gender Stereotypes in Disengagement and Deradicalization Practices," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 45(11), pp. 953-976.

Schuurman, B. and Bakker, E. (2015) "Reintegrating jihadist extremists: Evaluating a Dutch initiative, 2013–2014," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 8(1), pp. 66-85.

Shajkovci, A. *et al.* (2023) "Listening to women defectors from al Shabaab: Strengthening gender-sensitive disengagement efforts in Somalia," *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 30 (1), pp. 75-96.

Sjoberg, L. and Gentry, C.E. (2011) *Women, gender, and terrorism*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Souleimanov, E. and Huseyn, A. (2014) *The Individual Disengagement of Avengers, Nationalists, and Jihadists: Why Ex-Militants Choose to Abandon Violence in the North Caucasus*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Speckhard, A. and Yayla, A. S. (2015) "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 9(6), pp. 95-118.

Spencer, A. (2016) "The hidden face of terrorism: An analysis of the women in Islamic State," *Journal of Strategic Security*, 9(3), pp. 74-98.

Stanley, L. and Wise, S. (1992) "Feminist Epistemology and Ontology: Recent Debates in Feminist Social Theory," *Indian Journal of Social Work*, 53(3), pp. 343-365.

Suratman, Y.P. (2017) "The effectiveness of de-radicalization program in Southeast Asia: Does it work? the case of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore," *JAS (Journal of ASEAN Studies)*, 5(2), pp. 135-156.

Tagesschau (2022) *IS-Frauen und Kinder zurück in Deutschland*, tagesschau.de. Available at: <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/gesellschaft/islamischer-staat-rueckholaktion-101.html> (Accessed on 18.07.2023).

Termeer, A. and Duyvesteyn, I. (2022) "The inclusion of women in jihad: Gendered practices of legitimation in Islamic State Recruitment Propaganda," *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15(2), pp. 463-483.

Veilleux-Lepage Y., *et al.* (2023) "Gendered radicalisation and 'everyday practices': An analysis of extreme right and Islamic State women-only forums," *European Journal of International Security*, 8, pp. 227-242.

Veldhuis, T. (2012) *Designing Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programmes for Violent Extremist Offenders: A Realist Approach*, ICCT Research Paper, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. Available at: <https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/import/publication/ICCT-Veldhuis-Designing-Rehabilitation-Reintegration-Programmes-March-2012.pdf> (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

Vidino, L. and Marone, F. (2020) *The foreign fighter mobilizations from Europe*, Al-Mesbar Center. Available at: <https://mesbar.org/the-foreign-fighter-mobilizations-from-europe/> (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

Wdzięczak, H. (2022) “Gender mainstreaming in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism,” *Journal for Deradicalization*, 33, pp. 70-107.

Ziolkowski, B. (2017) “Die „Muhajirat“: Warum reisen Frauen ins Herrschaftsgebiet des IS?,” *Die Kriminalpolizei*. Available at: https://www.kriminalpolizei.de/ausgaben/2017/maerz/detailansicht-maerz/artikel/die-muhajirat.html?tx_web2pdf_pi1%5Baction%5D=&tx_web2pdf_pi1%5Bargument%5D=printPage&tx_web2pdf_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=Pdf&cHash=dedf8b32d49cc6ab9d86227bbe9d1749 (Accessed: 18.07.2023).

Appendix

Interview Questions:

Questions relating to the official state documents

- Do official state documents constitute the basis for the creation of new strategies?
- Which positive aspects do you see within the documents?
- Which aspects are lacking/missing from the official state documents?
- What role do European/international frameworks play in the measures you have in place for (female) foreign terrorist fighters?

Questions relating to the professional experience with female foreign terrorist fighters

- Do women constitute a part of the clientele in the programs for foreign fighters that your organisation offers?
- Which differences can you see between female and male foreign terrorist fighters?
- Which measures are effective/not effective when working with female foreign terrorist fighters?
- Does your organisation offer programs specially designed/only open to women?
- Which learnings have you gathered in the professional experience with female foreign terrorist fighters?

Questions relating to the creation of gender-sensitive strategies for the reintegration and deradicalisation of female foreign terrorist fighters

- Do you think that gender-sensitive measures for foreign terrorist fighters are necessary?
 - If yes why / If no why
- Which aspects are missing from the current strategies to be more appropriate for women?
- Do you think that gender-sensitive measures would create a positive impact on the deradicalisation and reintegration efforts of female foreign terrorist fighters?