

Norges miljø- og  
biovitenskapelige  
universitet

**Master's Thesis 2018 30 ECTS**

Department of International Environment and Development Studies  
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## **The Female Jihadists of Europe**

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**Declaration**

I, Ida Louise Rudolph, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....



*“A woman in the family is a mother, wife, sister, and daughter. In society she is an educator, propagator, and preacher of Islam, and a female jihad warrior. Just as she defends her family from any possible aggression, she defends society from destructive thoughts and from ideological and moral deterioration, and she is the soldier who bears (the man’s) pack and weapon on his back in preparation for the military offensive”.*

*-Al-Khansaa Magazine, 2004*



## Abstract

This study is concerned with the phenomena of female jihadists in Europe. The role of women in terrorism is a under-researched topic in academia, and women's participation in terrorism is often dismissed or re-packaged to fit in with society's expectations of gender roles. This has left a gap in the scholarly understanding of female terrorists, and particularly of those who adhere to the jihadist ideology. Jihadist ideology has traditionally viewed and treated women as inferior to men, and their gender ideology is highly conservative and discriminating against women. Simultaneously, female jihadism in Europe is increasing which signals that the relationship between female jihadists and the male-centric jihadist ideology is changing. This study set out to investigate how the role of jihadist women has changed over time and why by analysing multiple cases of female jihadism from the era of al-Qaeda to the era of Daesh. By applying a typology framework created by a leading expert on terrorism in Europe, this study found that the role of jihadist women in Europe has changed as a result of multiple factors, including women's own determination to participate in jihad and claim agency and due to the pragmatic choice by jihadist groups to make use of this untapped resource that women represent. The study also illustrate how the political and cultural atmosphere in Europe has influenced the growth of female jihadism, and stresses why it is imperative to apply gender as an analytical tool instead of simply using gender as a way to illustrate and define differences between the sexes. Gender must be applied as an analytical tool in terrorism studies to illustrate the relationship between gender and power.



## Acknowledgements

This thesis marks the end of the two-year master's programme in International Relations at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences for me but it also marks the end of nearly a decade as a university student. Truth be told, I am both scared and excited to see what the future will bring. Still, NMBU was a great place to spend these two last years of my student career, so I would like to express my deepest gratitude to them, and of course to the people who helped me throughout this research process.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Anne Stenersen for her guidance and support while writing this thesis. Your ideas, advice and encouragement was greatly appreciated. Thank you!

I would also like to thank Petter Nesser, who took the time to talk to me and shared his insights on the research topic. Your contribution was excellent and I am very grateful.

Sigrid, you have been invaluable throughout this process. Your advice and input helped me tremendously and I will forever remember our cabin trip. You are the best study partner anyone could ask for. To my friends and family, thank you for putting up with me these last few months, and a special thanks to my parents for always having my back.

Last but not least, I would not have made it through this process without the support, patience, encouragement and love from you, Till. *Vielen Dank!*

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

“It’s not my role to set off bombs — that’s ridiculous. I have a weapon. It’s to write. It’s to speak out. That’s my jihad. You can do many things with words. Writing is also a bomb” (El Aroud, 2008).

The words above belongs to Malika El Aroud, a Belgian-Moroccan activist who became famous amongst European Islamist movements and law enforcement agencies in the late 2000’s (The New York Times 2008). She called herself a “female holy warrior” for al-Qaeda, and was a prolific online voice and supporter of the radical group. Ms. El Aroud promoted the ideology and vision of al-Qaeda in online forums and rallied Muslim men and women to join their cause. She became a role model for radical women, and a growing concern for law enforcement. Ms. El Aroud’s activism symbolises a change in women’s involvement with and in militant Islamist groups. Historically, violent *jihad*, as El Aroud is referring to, has been a domain reserved for men. This has been the case concerning most radical groups and terrorist activity; those involved have been predominantly male. That does not mean that women have been absent, on the contrary; women have participated in terrorist activity as long as terrorism has existed, and they have been important actors in insurgencies and wars around the world (Gentry & Sjoberg 2011). They have nevertheless been outnumbered by their male counterparts, and thus not been a priority in academic research. In the last two decades, there has nevertheless been an increasing scholarly interest in studying women’s involvement in terrorism, due to among others The Black Widows in the Chechen conflict<sup>1</sup> and women like Ms. El Aroud supporting and promoting the ideology of violent jihad.

In 2001, international troops invaded Afghanistan as a response to the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in the United States which claimed the lives of more than 3000 people. The attack was

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<sup>1</sup> The Black Widows is a term used to describe Islamist female suicide bombers in the Russia/Chechen separatist/religious conflict in the North Caucasus (Gentry & Sjoberg 2011: 83-92).

perpetrated by members of the terrorist group al-Qaeda, led by radical Islamist Osama Bin Laden. The attack had enormous global impact in regards to international security and international relations, and it resulted in the still ongoing global War on Terror (Silke 2007: 76). It also galvanized world attention to the issue of terrorism. Prior to 2001, the understanding of Islamist terrorism as a phenomenon was relatively poor; the research and studies on it were limited and the lack of empirical evidence had resulted in underdeveloped counter-terrorism policies in several countries. Al-Qaeda drastically changed this, and terrorism became the most pressing issue in global politics. In the years following 2001, countless academic studies were conducted on all issues related to terrorism, including women's participation in it (*ibid.*:). However, despite that women have been involved in violent political and revolutionary conflicts throughout history, their participation is often dismissed or re-packaged to fit in more with the social, cultural and political notions of gender roles (Vogel 2014). Women who participate in violent conflict are often viewed as an abnormality or victims of circumstance while men's participation is taken at face value; the gendering of terrorism has denied the female terrorists political agency. Academia has also often focused the research on individual women who have gained notoriety in high impact cases rather than exploring generalizable group level trends in female participation. The role of women in these networks and groups have long been presumed to be "unimportant" supportive roles which has led to an underestimation of the significance these women have in a network's activities and overall success. This presumption is now gradually changing due to a number of highly sensationalized cases of female participation in terrorist activity over the last two decades (*ibid.*: 11).

On the 9th of November 2005, a suicide bomber ran into an American patrol car in Iraq, detonating a bomb that killed the bomber and wounded several others. The perpetrator was identified as 38 year old Muriel Degauque, a Belgian educated woman from the city of Charleroi (Jacques & Taylor 2013). Ms. Degauque had converted to Islam years before, and later married a radical Muslim, whom she moved to Morocco with to study Arabic and Islamic teachings. When Ms. Degauque was identified as the suicide bomber, it had a shock effect on law enforcement and the mainstream media. Not only was Ms. Degauque a woman but she was a Western educated, working class Belgian who was raised in a catholic home (Brown 2011: 706-707). It has been claimed that Ms. Degauque was a "wake up call" for the intelligence communities and academic world; women were not only involved in terrorist activity in supportive roles but

actually taking on an active role as perpetrators (*ibid.*:). The fact that Ms. Degauque was a Westerner only fueled the confusion; why would women who have been raised in Europe, educated on gender equality and women's empowerment, taught by their societies to demand their rights (as women) choose to adhere to a cause with an ideology that so blatantly oppresses them? Who are these women and how did they end up there? As noted, the scholarly understanding had been that women in such networks were limited to supporting roles, as the ideologies driving these networks have strict and conservative views on women's participation in every aspect of social and public life, not to mention that violent jihad was a domain traditionally reserved for men. After the attack by Ms. Degauque, several scientific studies were conducted with the goal of understanding how women got involved and their motivations for joining terrorist groups, particularly of those who become suicide bombers (see Mia Bloom 2011). Many of these studies have also questioned the motives of terrorist organizations to recruit women, in which Al-Qaeda, along with other Islamist movements, are particularly interesting exactly due to their conservative views on the role of women in society. Since the beginning of the new millennium, some branches of al-Qaeda have strategically incorporated women into their operations while others have blatantly refused. Gentry and Sjoberg (2011) explains this difference in tactic by different branches as a result of al-Qaeda now being a "networked transnational constituency rather than a monolithic, international terrorist organization with an identifiable command structure and control apparatus that it once was" (*ibid.*: 14). By recruiting women as suicide bombers, they are challenging the original jihadist ideology which views women as "pure" and the principal actors in the transmission of family morals and values, not as martyrs or warriors. Women who are not recruited by the groups but choose to commit such acts anyways also challenge the ideology signaling that individuals, and/or networks, may interpret its content differently.

Despite the overall conservative gender ideology of jihadist groups, women have been and are involved in a myriad of ways. They are recruiters, propagandists, financiers, logistical personnel, intelligence gatherers, moral supporters, wifes, mothers, educators, spies and suicide bombers (Gentry & Sjoberg 2011). Most of the studies that have in fact focused on women in these modern terrorist networks have focused on the regions where they mainly operate, the Middle East and Asia. The European networks have received much less attention.

In 2010, Malika El Aroud, who is mentioned above, was arrested and convicted of terrorist-related offenses and sentenced to eight years in prison in Belgium. Same year in London, after months of studying al-Qaeda inspired ideology, 20-year old university student Roshonara Choudhry stabbed her local Member of Parliament (MP) as a “punishment” for his vote in favour of the 2003 Iraq War (Pearson 2015). In 2015, 25-year old Sana Ahmed Khan was sentenced to life in prison alongside her ex-husband for plotting to blow up a London mall (The Guardian 2015). That same year, 26-year old Hayat Boumeddiene became France’ most wanted for her suspected involvement in her husband’s attack on a Jewish supermarket in Paris as well as her suspected links to the Charlie Hebdo assailants (The Guardian 2015). In November 2015, 26 year old Hasna Ait Boulachen was killed in a police raid alongside her cousin who was suspected to be the leader behind the Bataclan concert Paris attack (The Independent 2016). The following year, in September 2016, French intelligence dismantled a terrorist cell suspected of plotting an attack in Paris and four young women were arrested. These four suspects had pledged allegiance to the terrorist organization *Daesh*, also known as Islamic State, ISIL, or IS. Daesh grew out of al-Qaeda in Iraq and has become one of the dominant jihadist groups in the world. The cell described above was the first known all-female terror cell acting on behalf of Daesh on the European continent (The New York Times 2016). In other words, women are participating in jihadi networks not just in the Middle East but also in the Western world, and it appears this is an increasing trend (Deutsche Welle 2017). It also appears that the degree of their involvement is changing from being “invisible” supporters to becoming active participants. It is this changing degree in participation of women and their evolving role in Europe that led to the creation of this research study.

### **1.1 Research question**

In this research project I will look at how the roles of jihadist women in Europe have changed over time. This research project seeks to explore this objective by examining the roles women have had in the past leading up to present day by first looking at the al-Qaeda era of 2001-2013 and then the Daesh era from 2013 to present day. The following question will serve as the overall research question for this study:

*How and why has the role of female jihadists in Europe  
changed over the last two decades?*

The sub-questions are:

1. What characterized the traditional gender roles in European jihadist networks during the era of al-Qaeda (2001-2013) and how did these roles change over time?
2. What characterizes the contemporary gender roles in European jihadist networks affiliated with Daesh and how do they differ from that of al-Qaeda?
3. Which contextual factors may explain the increasing and evolving nature of the participation of female jihadists in Europe?

## **1.2 Objective of thesis**

To understand the role of women in modern terrorism, the phenomenon must be explored from multiple different perspectives. By studying these women, scholars and intelligence analysts may move toward a better understanding of terrorism in general by considering the influence of gender on the theoretical approaches of the field and how these approaches may influence outcomes. It is important to emphasize why this phenomenon is scientifically interesting in itself; why should we study the women separately from the men? In terrorism research, women have been largely excluded from the discourse despite the fact that they have been part of it. This trend is changing as policymakers and scientists realize that in order to understand terrorism and thereby be able to create effective countermeasures, all actors involved must be taken into consideration. Analyzing terrorism through a gender-focused lens will provide a fuller understanding of the social and structural dynamics in terrorist networks as well as challenge existing bias in the international response to terrorism; an insufficient gender focus in security institutions contributes to reinforce gender stereotypes of women and thus limiting approaches in countering violent extremism. The objective of this thesis is to add to the understanding of terrorism by studying the roles jihadist women have had in Europe over the last two decades.

## **Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a background on the phenomena the research is addressing and present existing literature relevant to the research topic. Examining existing literature is part of developing an argument about the significance of the particular research but also intended to provide a foundation for understanding key concepts and theories related to the research topic.

### **2.1 Definition of terrorism**

In order to study terrorism, or something connected to terrorism, it is important to have both a general and a critical understanding of the actual word, and the intellectual and political implications of using it. There is no universal agreement on a definition of “terrorism”. Multiple scholars have tried to define terrorism, such as Noam Chomsky, Walter Laquer, Ayatulla Taskhiri and Ted Robert Gurr (Best & Nocella 2004: 10-12). According to Steven Best & Anthony J. Nocella, II (2004), “terrorism” is a highly complex term but also a subjective, loaded, and politically charged term that is “relative to one’s political agenda, ideology and even one’s culture” (ibid.: 4). They point out that since “terrorism” is such a negative word and emotionally loaded, no government, individual or group will accept the negative consequences of the word, making “terrorism” always what someone else does (ibid.:). Therefore, there may never be a universally accepted definition of terrorism but as the German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein has suggested, “one cannot always precisely specify the necessary and sufficient elements of a definition but one can provide a cluster of related concepts” (Wittgenstein, cited in Best & Nocella 2004: 8). For decades, the international community tried to produce a definition that could be legally agreed upon to be implemented in international law but this proved to be extremely difficult. Terrorism is not a juridical concept, but it is a political concept influenced by cultural and ideological factors, thus making it a highly contentious term. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1566 was unanimously adopted in 2004, condemning “terrorist acts” as “criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the

general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act" (UN 2004). However, the overall definition of the term "terrorism" still remains disputed in the international community (Kiras 2014: 358). Kiras (2014) underline that terrorism is characterized first and foremost by the use of violence and it takes many forms; political, religious, environmental and so on. The second characterization is that the violence is often targeted towards non-combatants, or civilians. The reasons and root causes for this violence is where the disagreement in the international community arise. He adds that historically, the word "terrorism" was used to describe state violence against citizens during the French Revolution in the late 18th century yet now in the 21st century, it is used to describe violence by small groups aiming to achieve political change (*ibid.*:). In other words, terrorism and what we understand it to be changes with time and in discourse. On the other hand, Nesser (2016) emphasizes that however contentious the term may be, it does not have to be problematized in the particular context of studying jihadism in Europe considering "the essence of terrorism is to use violent attacks to spread fear with the intention of sending a political message" (*ibid.*: 5). Therefore, for the sake of simplicity, Nesser's definition of terrorism will be used for this study.

## **2.2 Jihad and jihadism**

The focus of this research is women connected to Islamist terrorism in Europe, often framed as "jihadist" terrorism. Female jihadists are inspired by "jihadism", a term that refers to Sunni Muslim militant ideologies and movements that calls for armed struggle "in the cause of God" (Nesser 2011: 174). The self-proclaimed goals of jihadists is to establish Islamic Emirates, defend Muslim territories and re-establish the Caliphate (*ibid.*:). In academic discourse, the term *jihadism* has been subject to debate ever since it came into official discourse in the late 1990's (Neumann 2014). In Islamic teachings, *jihad* is a religious term that means struggle, whether economic, social or personal. However, the term now also refers to terrorism and extreme violence. Peter R. Neumann, a renowned terrorism scholar, stresses the importance of distinguishing between *jihad* and *jihadism*, the latter being a modern revolutionary ideology, whereas *jihad* in its original meaning is not related to terrorism or violence. Modern-day jihadists follow a religious doctrine which promotes an extremely narrow and puritanical interpretation of Sunni Islam wherein violent *jihad*, is the only way to establish the Caliphate and defeat all *infidels*, or non-believers (*ibid.*:). It is their interpretation of *violent jihad* this paper refers to

when using the term, not its original meaning, and this thesis refers to the women in focus as female ‘jihadists’, as jihadists refer to themselves as such (Aslan 2010: 24-27).

### **2.3 Women in jihad**

The issue of women fighting in jihad is a much debated and contested issue in contemporary legal Islamic literature. The ideological literature of jihad excludes women from combat, with the exception of *fard ‘ayn*, in which all men, women and children are obligated to fight (Lahoud 2014: 780). Most Islamic scholars and philosophers have historically refrained from calling on women to fight, as have most jihadist scholars and ideologues. Still, contemporary jihadists have invoked the classical interpretation of *fard ‘ayn* despite the objections from the majority of their ideologues, and they call on all Muslims to join their cause (*ibid.*: 780-785). To which degree they in fact urge women to physically take up arms and join the battlefield differs depending on the different ideologues and not least, how their messages are interpreted by the actual audience (*ibid.*:).

Classical literature contains very little material concerning the issue of women participating in jihad while contemporary literature began addressing this aspect from the beginning of the 1990’s, much due to the emergence of “Islamic feminism” and the changing attitudes towards women in the Muslim world (Cook 2005: 378). One Muslim writer, Muhammad Khayr Haykal, discussed the issue of women fighting in jihad in his 1993 three volume work “*Jihad and Fighting according to the Shar‘i Policy*”. He distinguished between two types of jihad: jihad as *fard kifaya*, where the obligation of jihad is upon part of the Muslim community, and jihad as *fard ‘ayn*, where the obligation of jihad is upon each and every one of the members of the Muslim community. He believed that in the first, there was no need for women to participate in fighting while in the second, “women would have to fight” (*ibid.*: 379). According to his research, considering most legal sources demands all Muslims to fight in the case of *fard ‘ayn* (obligation of jihad upon every member of a Muslim community), his conclusion was that women then would have the obligation to fight (*ibid.*:). Haykal also believed that women should have a place in a regular army of an Islamic state, arguing that “*from this we believe that it is incumbent upon the Islamic state to prepare training centers for women so that they can learn the use of arms and methods of fighting in them. This is because as long as it is possible that*

*jihad could become fard ‘ayn upon the woman, it is incumbent to train her for this eventually so that she will be prepared to fulfill this obligation”* (Haykal 1993, cited in Cook 2005: 379).

Similar arguments can be found with other Muslim scholars (albeit with different reasoning), including revolutionary writers promoting radical Islam. Yusuf al-’Ayyiri, one of the ideological leaders of the Saudi Arabian branch of al-Qaeda, wrote an 18-page document titled “*The Role of Women in the Jihad against Enemies*” suggesting that women were in fact one of the main reasons why men did *not* want to fight in jihad: they felt obligated by familial responsibilities and the women tied them to this world thus making al-’Ayyiri arguing that women should be brought into the jihad process instead of being sidelined (*ibid.*:). He used examples of women who were famous participants and supporters in the time of the Prophet Muhammad and more contemporary examples from the Chechen and Palestinian conflicts to illustrate the necessity of women’s support in jihad. However, al-’Ayyiri did not make the revolutionary call to women in his pamphlet; instead he urged women to look back to the historical examples of women participating in jihad if their husbands or sons were called to jihad, and not be obstacles (*ibid.*: 382-383). On the other hand, the majority of Islamic scholars, including radical ones, still argue that there is no place for women “on the battlefield” according to the classical interpretation of jihad, which is still the dominant one. The fact that some contemporary scholars have suggested the opposite, may be a signal that the discourse is changing within the Islamic world, or it could mean that some are interpreting its meaning to fit into their particular perspective, for instance to justify the use of female fighters (*ibid.*:).

## **2.4 Female jihadists in Europe**

In 2017, Europol, the European Union’s law enforcement agency, reported in their annual “Terrorism Situation and Trend Report” that women have increasingly assumed more operational roles in jihadist terrorism activities in the EU, as have minors and young adults. In 2016, 718 people were arrested on suspicion of jihadist terrorism related offences, whereas one in four of the arrestees, which amounts to 26%, were women while in 2015, this number was 18% (Europol 2017: 22). The report suggests that women are not only facilitating other operatives in various ways but also increasingly active in the execution of terrorist attacks themselves. The European continent has witnessed women participating in jihadist terrorism since the beginning of the 21st century, most notably in the Chechen conflict in the North

Caucasus. In June 2000, Khava Barayeva and Luisa Magomadova drove a truck filled with explosives into the Russian Special Forces headquarters in the village of Alkhan Yurt, Chechnya, resulting in two casualties and five wounded (Speckhard & Akhmedova 2006). Two years later, in October 2002, nineteen women strapped in suicide vests participated in the Dubrovka Theater hostage crisis in Moscow, which ultimately resulted in the deaths of over 170 people, including 40 terrorists (*ibid.*:). The women partaking in this event gained global attention and led to their infamous nickname Chechen “Black Widows” at the international stage (Gentry & Sjoberg 2011:86). There have been more than twenty successful suicide attacks by these “black widows” since year 2000. According to Anne Speckhard, a terrorism scholar, women have been involved in the Chechen conflict since its inception, holding a variety of roles but most notably as suicide bombers (Speckhard & Akhmedova 2006). In comparison, there have been few known cases of women’s direct involvement in terrorist activity in Western Europe yet a few cases over the last two decades, as described in the introduction of this paper, do stand out. As intelligence agencies have warned of the increasing participation of women in jihadist terrorist activity, a possibility is that women’s involvement have not been successfully uncovered considering that “female militant jihadists in the West perceive fewer obstacles to playing an operative role in a terrorist attack than men” (Europol 2017:7). As a result, it has proven somewhat difficult to locate academic research specifically focusing on this particular context, and as earlier noted, much of the literature that does exist, focus on women’s restrictive roles in traditional Islamist ideology or on their role as victims, not as active participants.

A phenomenon that has received wide attention in the last years is female western migrants to regions in the Middle East controlled by extremist groups. It is estimated that between 3000-4000 individuals from the EU have traveled to these regions since mid-2012, with 17% of them being women (ICCT 2016). This unprecedented number of both Western male and female so-called foreign fighters have baffled the observers, particularly in regards to the female migrants, and has prompted debates on identity, culture, refugees and immigration issues in many European countries (Saltman & Smith 2015). This phenomenon has also influenced the security discourse as a major concern has been that these migrants will return to the West to commit violent attacks. In regards to the female migrants, studies have been conducted to understand their motivations as well as the *radicalization* processes that led to their migration. These women have been highly active online on social media, allowing observers to get an impression of how

daily life looks like and what tasks these women perform in their communities. Their online activity has been the basis of several studies, including a two-part study on female western migrants to Daesh territory by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (Hoyle et al. 2015). These women have nevertheless been regarded as migrants, not jihadists or extremists, since the majority of them take up familial and traditional roles within the communities they come to live and are therefore not be put in the same category as the women in focus of this research. The research focusing on them do nevertheless provide some insight into the gender structures within these networks and groups, and also illustrate an important aspect related to the topic; an increasing acceptance of an ideology that promotes violent jihadism. It is the women in Europe who adhere to this violent ideology, and who are committed to participate in terrorist activity on its behalf this research is concerned with. The following section will review some of the relevant literature on the study of women in terrorism as well as address academic limitations on this topic.

## **2.5 Literature review**

The existing literature on female terrorism covers a wide range of topics and facets of women's involvement with and in terrorism, and there has been an increase in scholarly publications focusing exclusively on this area in recent years. The following section will review parts of that literature with an emphasis on women connected to the jihadist movement but before proceeding, a short emphasis on the importance of including women and the concept of gender into the terrorism discourse will be given below.

### *2.5.1 Gendering terrorism*

In several recent studies, an emphasis on applying a gender-specific lens when studying terrorism or terrorists has been stressed. Vogel, Porter and Kebbell (2013) note that academia has excluded and underestimated women's participation in violent conflicts due to their presumed "unimportant roles" as mere supporters, not active participants, and thus limiting the scientific understanding of terrorist networks as these "unimportant" roles are in fact contributing to the overall success of such networks (*ibid.*). The authors point out that this trend denies women agency as political or religious actors; they are excluded from the discourse. Gentry and Sjoberg, too, problematize the current academic trend of denying these women attention due to their "unimportant" roles, and for applying stereotypical traits to the women in question such as

explaining their involvement as a result of grief, revenge, manipulation or other pathologies (Gentry and Sjoberg 2011). As they emphasise, women's participation in terrorism is not new nor a phenomenon exclusive to the twenty-first century. Women have participated in several insurgencies and movements both in the past and the present (*ibid.*: 58). Women were active participants in European and Latin American leftist militant groups in the 1960's and 1970's, in Palestinian groups in the 1980's and 1990's, and in the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) movement in Sri Lanka from the 1970's to late 2000's. Still, female participation in terrorist groups receive a distinctively different and more sensationalized type of attention from both the media and international community. Gentry and Sjoberg (2011) note that "the very statement that "women" can be terrorists or even violent seems to be a contradiction in terms to many as "women" are widely associated with notions of femininity; peacefulness, mothering and care (*ibid.*: 3). The renowned terrorism scholar, Marc Sageman (2008), even described small terrorist cells as consisting of "a bunch of guys", signaling that terrorist cells and extremist groups consist only of "guys". Sageman is of course aware that women can be violent and part of terrorist groups but framings and descriptions such as these reinforce the biased stereotypes of women in terrorism discourse. Society does not relate violence to women. Therefore, when a woman commits a terrorist act or is revealed to participate in such activities, it produces a wide range of questions of why's and how's, and people try to make sense of this contradiction, often resulting in the reproduction of stereotypes.

The popular assumption that women are not violent by nature has led to the construction of representations of violent women and terrorist as either "deviants", brainwashed victims or vengeful and grieving widows. Brigitte L. Nacos (2005) argues that "there is no evidence that male or female terrorists are fundamentally different in terms of their recruitment, motivation, ideological fervor or brutality- just as there is no evidence that male and female politicians have fundamentally different motivations for seeking political office and abilities in different policy areas" (*ibid.*: 436). Yet, as Nacos concludes, the framing of female terrorists is consistent with societal gender stereotypes which not only reinforce stereotypes of women in general but it also hinders a nuanced and objective understanding of female terrorists. It should nevertheless be emphasised that even though stereotypes of female terrorists is reproduced in certain fields and by certain scholars, there has been a noticeable change in this respect in the last decade. Academic studies focusing exclusively on female terrorists, their motivations, and roles have

been conducted which critically examine and challenge the biased understanding, and previous research, of female participation in terrorism. Mia Bloom, a terrorism expert and author of the 2011 book, *Bombshell*, studied the phenomenon of female suicide bombers, comparing historical and contemporary data on female terrorists ranging from Northern Ireland to Iraq in an attempt to answer what motivates women to blow themselves up (Bloom 2011). Bloom's research provides four recurring explanations to this question; revenge for the death of male family members, redemption for past sins or stigma, relationships, and respect from their communities and loved ones. She also adds a potential fifth explanation, rape, and argues that sexual exploitation of women in conflict areas is increasing, and may therefore be a motivation for victims of rape to seek redemption through martyrdom (*ibid.*: 236-237). However, according to Gentry and Sjoberg, while these observations by Mia Bloom are not necessarily inaccurate, they fall under an already existing trend of attributing women's participation in terrorism to personal motivations and pathologies whilst considering male participation as political (Gentry & Sjoberg 2011: 13). Finally, these gendered approaches by Bloom in explaining women's participation in terrorism deny the women political agency and deny them the responsibilities of their actions by placing the blame indirectly onto the community in which they live or onto the men around them.

Eva Herschinger (2014) argues that researchers approach the phenomena of women in terrorism differently depending on if it is women as *victims* of terrorism or as agents in counter-terrorism, or if it is women as *perpetrators* of terrorism. She points out that in the first, gender is used as an analytical tool while in the latter, academic literature rarely addresses gender as an analytical category but instead address gender in terms of sex (*ibid.*: 53). Herschinger emphasises that using gender as an analytical category can help avoid gender blindness in terrorism research which already tends to equate political violence with male violence, and is always baffled by female violence, and therefore, conceptualizing gender as difference in sexes continues to treat female violence as an indication of gender deviance, as a threat to the social order. She concludes that gender should be considered as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power", and not as "social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes" (*ibid.*:).

### *2.5.2 Female terrorism*

In order to gain an understanding of the role of women in terrorism, it is also necessary to ask the question; does gender matter in the study of terrorism? Is it worthwhile and scientifically interesting to study female terrorists as something distinct from male terrorists? There has been a debate within the academic community whether or not psychological profiles on militant women, or female terrorists, is in fact a useful paradigm (Gentry & Sjoberg 2011: 29). Some scholars disagree whether it is fruitful to study female terrorists as distinct or unique from their male-counterparts as previous research has shown common patterns and themes studying male and female terrorists. Also, the psychological profiles of these men and women will vary depending on which context, conflict and country they are part of, not to mention that even within one context the *individual* motivations may differ. On the other hand, other scholars have claimed that there is a distinct difference in the etiology of male and female terrorists, and they should therefore be studied separately (*ibid.*: 30). A research study by Karen Jacques and Paul J. Taylor from 2013 found that despite male and female terrorists sharing some similarities, there are still various sociodemographic differences between them in addition to female terrorists not meeting the expectations set out by studies of male terrorists. They conclude that given these differences across gender, it is important to understand terrorism in gender-specific terms (Jacques and Taylor 2013). Thus, they argue, the study of terrorism would be incomplete without a thorough understanding of women's roles. Generating a scientific understanding of terrorism and the participants in terrorist activity requires a multifaceted approach which takes *all* the actors involved into consideration, not solely the dominant one. Most terrorism studies have focused on the male roles within terrorists groups, and this not only leaves a significant gap in the understanding of terrorists groups themselves but also fosters the inaccurate assumption that women are not present in modern terrorism. This assumption is based on biases and stereotypes that to an extent hinders the understanding of terrorism as a phenomenon and thereby the subsequent responses to it (Davis 2017: 13-14).

In the contemporary literature on women in terrorism, there are a couple of cases that has received wider scholarly attention than others; the Black Widows of Chechnya, the female suicide bombers in the Palestinian conflict and the women in the Sri Lankan conflict (Bloom 2011). However, in recent years there has been a shift and the women adhering to groups such as al-Qaeda and Daesh are now at the forefront. Jacques & Taylor (2009) conducted a literature

review on female terrorism in 2009, arguing that much of the existing research has focused on specific geographical areas, e.g. country-specific, on specific events or conflicts, often making a comparison across disciplines difficult (*ibid.*: 500). The foci and methods used to study these women vary yet there has been a noticeable emphasis on their psychological profiles, e.g. pathways to radicalisation. They further argue that the literature on female terrorism has a tendency to rely on secondary rather than primary data, narrative rather than statistical comparisons and descriptions rather than explanations of events (*ibid.*:). In terms of recurring themes in the literature on female terrorism, Jaques & Taylor identified six primary foci in the research (Jaques & Taylor 2009: 503). The research tends to focus on historical accounts of female terrorism; perceptions of female terrorists, particularly media representations; the roles of female terrorists; motivational factors and recruitment and environmental enablers (*ibid.*:). They argue that some studies focus exclusively on one of the six, while others include a secondary focus. Women's roles in terrorist networks was only the main focus in 6 out of 54 reviewed publications while an historical overview of female involvement in terrorism was the main focus in 22 publications. This review is from 2009, and much has changed in regards to terrorism since then yet a still recurring criticism has been that terrorism studies have not managed to incorporate gender as an analytical tool in the scientific research.

### 2.5.3 Female jihadism

The female suicide bomber is conceivably the phenomenon that has garnered the most interest. In contrast to Jaques & Taylor's view, Mia Bloom's *Bombshell* examines cases from different conflicts across regions and argues that there are different contexts yet similar motivational factors to be found across the spectrum. She argues that women are drawn to terrorism for different personal reasons but that these reasons are not exclusive for that particular context; suicide bombers of the IRA shared similarities with those in the Palestinian conflict (Bloom 2012). Davis (2017) shares Bloom's view and also emphasises the pragmatic choice by terrorist groups of recruiting women and stresses that terrorist groups can, regardless of ideology, use women as tactical operatives. As she points out, terrorist groups, and terrorists, are highly pragmatic and will use all potential resources to achieve their goals. This helps to explain the sometimes contradictory gender ideologies of such groups and why jihadist groups, who have conservative views on the role of women in battle, and in society, do recruit women into terrorist plots (*ibid.*:). Case studies of individual female terrorists such as for instance Wafa Idris, Leila

Khaled, and Muriel Decage are also prominent in the literature, and these cases are often used to illustrate the different facets of female involvement in terrorism (Jacques & Taylor 2009: 506). According to Jaques & Taylor's review, case studies are frequently used for descriptive or theory building purposes to detail motivations for terrorist activity (*ibid.*:).

A different group that have surfaced in recent years is Boko Haram in the African region. The group pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda, and Boko Haram has become infamous for the use of women as suicide bombers, and for the systematic kidnapping of young girls (Davis 2017: 105). The group's ideology is based upon Salafist thoughts and writings, sharing many similarities with the ideology of al-Qaeda. Their ideology is nevertheless selectively applied. Davis (2017) describes Boko Haram as a modern Islamist movement that despite rejecting Western influences, has shown a technologically sophisticated and complex strategy in their attacks. They use modern equipment such as automatic weapons and artillery, and part of this modernism is demonstrated by the use of women and girls as suicide bombers (*ibid.*:). A comprehensive study by Warner and Matfess (2017) showed that out of 283 suicide attacks between 2011 and 2017 by Boko Haram, 56% of these were committed by women (*ibid.*:)

Mohammad Abu Rumman & Hassan Abu Hanieh published in 2017 conceivably the most detailed and in-depth study on female jihadism in recent years. It centers on women of al-Qaeda and Daesh and covers historical formations of female jihadism, contemporary trends and changes, and examines cases from both the Middle East, Europe and the United States (Rumman & Hanieh 2017). The study investigates several aspects of female jihadism, including both historical and contemporary issues, and they particularly focus on the shift in allegiance by jihadists from al-Qaeda to Daesh. They argue that this is a result of multiple pull factors, including Daesh' extensive and successful propaganda strategy of recruiting women online and the attraction they espouse of having established the 'Caliphate'. (*ibid.*:). The study discusses 47 cases of female jihadism from around the world, including European cases, some more detailed than others, and gives a thorough description of the implications this phenomenon has on the global, regional and local levels. This study stands out from the other literature reviewed here in the sense that it is written from a non-Western perspective, by two Jordanian experts on extremism.

## **2.6 Concluding remarks**

As the review above has shown, the scientific inquiries into the relation between gender and terrorism has not increased at the same speed as terrorism in general. Still, literature on women participating in terrorism, and particularly women who adhere to Daesh and Al-Qaeda, has become a field of significant interest in the last years due to sensationalized attacks perpetrated by women and the unprecedented migration of young female Westerners to regions controlled by Islamist groups. Nevertheless, their roles have a tendency to be underestimated in the discourse and overlooked as unimportant supportive roles, and the epicenter of the research has been on their motivations and push and pull factors for radicalising and/or migrating. The European context, the role of jihadist women on the continent and the social structures within jihadist networks, appears to be an even more under-researched topic, despite it being a growing concern to European law enforcement and policy-makers. In an attempt to make a contribution to this under-researched area, the following chapters will go more in-depth on the European context and, as will be explained in the following chapter, the study will use a specific typology to analyse the case studies to illustrate the different roles operating within jihadist networks, and explore why the role of jihadist women has changed.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

This study is using a constructivist lens to approach the research questions as terrorism and gender are both social constructed terms; they are contentious and subject to different interpretations depending on the perspective of the observer, and will differ from state to state and culture to culture.

The following chapter will present the theoretical framework used for this study. The first section will assess the constructivist perspective on the study of terrorism and argue why this paradigm fits better than other theoretical perspectives when exploring the chosen topic. The second section will present Petter Nesser's typology of jihadists in Europe, which will be applied as the analytical framework in order to create an overview of the different roles that operate within these networks. The third section will summarize and assess the chosen combination of constructivism and Nesser's typology as the analytical framework for this research.

### **3.1 Constructivism and terrorism**

In international relations scholarship, world politics and phenomenons in global affairs are explained through different ontological and epistemological lenses, or perspectives, in order to understand and explain them (Theys 2017: 36). Terrorism is one such phenomenon that has turned out to be a highly challenging topic in today's world, and explaining terrorism and the emergence of terrorist groups through the different traditional IR lenses has proven to be a difficult task. The traditional theories, such as liberalism and realism, are state-centric theories that views states as self-interested actors, and the unequal distribution of power between them defines the balance of power between states. Realists believe that the international system is defined by anarchy and self-help due to absence of a supranational authority, forcing states to fight and secure themselves. Liberalists, who have a slightly more positive worldview, also focus on the state but stresses that states cooperate to improve the lives of their citizens, and the overall well being of the earth, and therefore construct international institutions tasked to create efficient international cooperation. These two traditions disagree on various issues but they do share a

commitment to the idea of individualism (actors have fixed interests which constraints behaviour) and materialism (that behaviour is constrained by a structure defined by power, technology and geography). In other words, these theories have not focused or emphasised on the agency of individuals and their influence on the international system. This agent-structure problem is one of the key tenets of *constructivism* (ibid.: 36-37).

Constructivists sees the world, and what we know about it, as socially constructed. Constructivism is concerned with the notion of human consciousness and its role in international politics (Finnemore & Sikkink 2002). It is a theoretical approach to social analysis “that asserts the following: (a) human interaction is shaped primarily by ideational factors, not simply material ones; (b) the most important ideational factors are widely shared or “intersubjective” beliefs, which are not reducible to individuals; and (c) these shared beliefs construct the interests and identities of purposive actors” (ibid.: 393). Constructivists stresses a holistic and idealist view of structures and they argue that agency and structure are mutually constituted; structure influence agency and agency influences structures. Agency can be understood as the ability of someone to act while structures refers to the international system consisting of material and ideational elements, and constructivists believe that actors who have the capacity can change or reinforce structures if the ideas and beliefs of multiple states allow it, for instance initiating cooperation to prevent climate change, while realists believe that “the anarchic structure of the international system determines the behaviour of states” (Theys 2017: 37). Constructivism is therefore more a social theory that is concerned with conceptualizing the relationship between agents and structures rather than a substantive theory which offers specific claims and hypotheses about patterns in world politics (ibid.:).

Constructivists argue that we put meaning to things and therefore, if these meanings change then our interpretation of them change. To illustrate, Alexander Wendt (1995) provides an example that 500 British nuclear weapons is much less threatening to the United States than five North Korean nuclear weapons because the United Kingdom and United States are allies and friends while North Korea and the United States are not. If that relationship were to change to one of friendship, then their nuclear weapons would not be threatening (ibid.: 73). A constructivist perspective can therefore better explain why there is no consensus on a definition of “terrorism”. Concepts and terms, such as *terrorist*, are created and applied meaning in discourse. The

discourse will be influenced by those participating in it; by the identity and interests of these individuals and/or collective identities e.g. states. These will differ depending on culture, history, religion, policies, political alliances etc. From a constructivist lens, interests are shaped by identities. How can we know what we want unless we know who we are? Also, identity will determine actions. A nation promoting peace and diplomacy will not engage in war crimes just as a small nation will not challenge a global hegemon to war. States are expected to behave and comply according to the social norms associated with their identity (Theys 2017: 37). It is important to note that these identities and interests can change over time. To illustrate, Nelson Mandela was once considered a terrorist in his home country of South Africa and imprisoned for 27 years. He later went on to become president of that nation, a national icon for democracy and social justice, and a Nobel peace prize winner (Schmidt 2013).

The “female terrorist” is also social construction, just as gender is a constructed term. Gender and sex are not synonyms. Sex refers to the biological characteristics of a person that distinguishes if that person is biologically male or female while gender refers to the roles, expectations and characteristics associated with being a male or being a female. Gender is a social construction shaped by culture, society, behavioral expectations, stereotypes and rules (Gentry and Sjoberg 2011: 4). Today, we often talk about gender as a universal and static concept. However, conceptualizations of gender has changed over time and they vary across cultures. To put it simply, gender expectations in one part of the world may differ from that of others. Gender is nevertheless always constructed to symbolize hierarchies of power, as women in all parts of the world, are still economically, politically and socially disadvantaged compared to men. The female terrorist therefore contradicts the gender expectations society relates to women, and we construct it as something pathological or as an exception to the ‘normal’ (*ibid.*:).

From a constructivist perspective then, terrorism is a social construction, hence a social fact created in discourse (Hülsse and Spencer 2008: 571). Terrorism and terrorists are perceived as threats to the international community because these “threats” were constructed in discourse. Terrorism is not static but dynamic. It comes in waves and it is the result of a process, beginning at one stage and then culminating at the end stage. This process is a result of social structures where the participating actors have a shared understanding (*ibid.*:). It is to these actors we now turn, not to explore in-depth their motivations or reasons for becoming extremists, but to

examine how the social structures have influenced and changed the role of jihadist women in Europe. The following section will present a typology to illustrate the different roles operating within European jihadist networks.

### **3.2 Nesser's typology of jihadist terrorists in Europe**

Petter Nesser, one of Norway's leading expert on Islamist terrorism, introduced in his 2015 book "*Islamist Terrorism in Europe*" a typology of jihadist terrorists in Europe. This typology was developed based on observation and data depicting the behaviors and roles of terrorists and members of jihadi networks. Nesser distinguishes between four types; 'the entrepreneur', 'the protege', 'the misfit' and 'the drifter' (Nesser 2015: 12). This typology explains the different roles and motivations of the four main types, where the first two are the most important ones in the emergence of terrorist plots in regards to recruiting, planning and ideological commitment while the two remaining differ in motivation, dedication and behavior. According to Nesser, the misfits and the drifters can be characterized as those who are less ideologically informed or dedicated, more socially awkward, feeling marginalized in their societies and at times, just in a rebellious phase (*ibid.*: 12-17). This typology was developed based on data collected on male terrorists, or male members of jihadist networks. Still, considering multiple studies have shown that there are in fact many similarities between male and female terrorists, yet also differences in their etiology, this typology will be applied in the analysis with the notion that it might be somewhat adjusted or extended if need be to better assess the women in question. In other words, Nesser's typology is the chosen framework to illustrate the different categories of jihadists in Europe but the research may come to suggest how it could be customized to assess jihadist women. Nesser's typology will be explained in further detail below.

The *entrepreneur* in Nesser's typology is by far the most important role in the emergence of a terrorist cell and also terrorist plots. These entrepreneurs are the activists who proactively connect with extremist networks and militant groups in conflict zones. They are passionate about social and political issues, and do not necessarily come off as violent individuals themselves but instead justifies the violence based on the idea of jihad as a religious duty and therefore necessary. They are the recruiters, they socialise with their recruits, indoctrinate them in both political and ideological beliefs, promote group cohesion within the cell and foster admiration towards jihadist organizations, for instance al-Qaeda (Nesser 2015: 13-14). The entrepreneurs

are in charge of the cell's operational activities and communications with associated networks or organizations, both domestically and internationally. According to Nesser, they are often more educated and experienced than their accomplices, and sometimes family men. They are charismatic and possess a talent in manipulating others while at the same time not coming off as dominant or hierarchical but rather inspirational (ibid.:).

The *protégé* is the second in command and always junior and inferior to the entrepreneur. Proteges tend to be intelligent, educated and well mannered individuals highly functioning in social, academic and professional settings. They are devout idealists, embracing militant ideology, and they idolize the entrepreneurs which is often based on a strong personal bond resulting from a long friendship or shared background. The entrepreneurs and proteges share characteristics such as for instance that they are well educated and often economically well-off which illustrates how jihadist ideology attracts intelligent and educated persons. This speaks to the degree of their devotion and ideological conviction considering these individuals often have more to lose if they are caught (ibid.:).

The third type in Nesser's typology is the *misfit*. This misfit is often driven by personal misfortunes such as troubled backgrounds, often due to criminal activity or familial issues, and they are far less ideologically devout than the two former types. Nesser describes them as individuals with little charisma and weaker personalities, often devoting themselves to an ideological cause to cope with personal issues or out of loyalty to family or friends. Also, Nesser notes that in some instances they get involved in a network or cell to cleanse themselves of past sins. Misfits often show violent tendencies, and are given practical tasks such as requiring weapons or other necessities. They are also likelier to show signs of remorse or regret if caught or confronted as opposed to the ideologically devout leaders of the cells.

The fourth and final category, the *drifter*, is the type of terrorist that fits in with dominant radicalisation theories, where emphasis is put on social connections and group dynamics in the radicalisation process and ultimately, resulting in recruitment to a terrorist cell according to Nesser (2015). Drifters may be the majority group of those who become involved in terrorist cells and plots in Europe, they are initially not ideologically or politically driven but seek social commitment and social reward. They differ from the misfits in the sense that they have rarely

experienced serious social or personal troubles but they are simply “in the wrong place at the wrong time, or they know the wrong people” (*ibid.*: 17). Drifters are rarely entrusted with important tasks or information due to their lack of true devotion to the cause but they represent manpower, and can fill supportive roles (*ibid.*:).

### **3.3 Concluding remarks**

Nesser’s typology describes four ideal categories, or types, of jihadists in Europe. They inhabit different roles within networks and cells. While this typology presents personality characteristics of the different types, it also connects tasks and responsibilities assigned to each of the types. For instance, the entrepreneurs are the ones in charge based on their personal traits which makes them suitable and highly functional in that particular role while the drifters represent manpower. They are all important players in the networks, functioning in different roles and performing different tasks and responsibilities with a common objective and end goal. Constructivism offers a framework for thinking about the nature of social life and social interaction but it does not offer a specific explanation of the agents or structures; that must come from another source. Finnemore & Sikkink (2002) explains that constructivism does not provide “substantive explanations or predictions of political behavior until coupled with a more specific understanding of who the relevant actors are, what they want, and what the content of social structures might be” (*ibid.*: 393). Therefore, using a constructivist lens combined with Nesser’s typology as the analytical framework will serve as a multifaceted approach equipped to shed light on the social structures within jihadist ideology, and in the European context, and the influence of these on the role of female jihadists.

## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on the scientific methods used to collect data and information for this study. Methodology is the scientific methods used in a research project to collect data (Dalland 2012: 111). Structured methodology is a necessary component of the research process and research is done with the help of study, observation, experiment, analysis and comparison (*ibid.*:). This thesis draws on theoretical literature, an expert interview, media sources and five case studies to answer the research question and sub-questions presented in chapter one.

### **4.1 Qualitative research approach**

There are two main approaches to research in social sciences; qualitative and quantitative methodology. Qualitative research is an empirical approach where research data can be categorized and classified, while quantitative data is measured in numbers and statistics (Bryman 2016) This research is a qualitative research study. Qualitative research studies aim to give an analytical description of a given situation; the aim might be to give a theoretical generalization. Quantitative research studies aim to give statistical generalizations to describe a larger population, which can be measured in numbers (Bryman 2016: 149). Given the very nature of the research topic, and the research question being of exploratory character, the qualitative approach was deemed most beneficial for this kind of study. The research has been conducted as a combined desk-study, based on reports, news articles, academic books and journals, and qualitative interviewing. Qualitative studies are characterized by closeness and sensitivity due to the personal involvement of the researcher in the environment. Quantitative studies are characterized by distance and selectivity. Another aspect of qualitative research is the interpretation of findings. Quantitative interpretations often take on a more structured and precise form, while qualitative researchers extract key findings and make relevant interpretations (Dalland 2011: 115).

## **4.2 Research design**

The research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data and refers to the strategy a researcher use for the study. Choosing what type of design depends on the subject and research question. A case study is an in-depth, contextual examination of a specific phenomenon (Yin 2003). The purpose of a case study is not to find a universal explanation but rather clarify the realities of a specific case. A case study investigates a person, place, event, period, phenomenon or other type of subject to extract key themes (*ibid.*). This research investigates the phenomenon of female jihadists in Europe. That in itself is a single and unique phenomenon. Still, in order to compare how the roles of these women have changed and for what reasons over the last two decades, a selection of representative cases from each era have been picked out for analysis. Each of these cases are also individual case studies, and each decade could also be applied as a single case study. Therefore, each of the individual jihadists presented in the analysis is a ‘case’ and I am comparing five cases in order to answer the research questions. Hence, a multiple case study design is applied. A multiple case study design allows the researcher to study differences and similarities between a selected sample of cases within a research area, or topic (*ibid.*: 45). This approach has distinct advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that the evidence, or findings, from multiple cases are often considered more compelling thus making the overall study more robust. Also, it allows the researcher to analyze the data both within each case and across cases, or situations. The researcher can thus make extensive comparisons and yield more findings that shed light on the overall topic. A disadvantage is that this approach is often time-consuming, expensive and requires extensive amount of data and resources (*ibid.*). Still, evidence founded in a multiple case study is often considered stronger and more reliable compared to a single-case study. However, this is naturally dependent on the quality of the data and analysis made by the researcher.

## **4.3 Multiple case study design**

The female jihadists in Europe is the research topic of this study. Over the last two decades, female participation in jihadist activity has increased taneouslytounslly as the overall terrorist activity in Western Europe has increased. As jihadist terrorism has historically been preserved for men, it is both an interesting yet worrisome development which up until now, has received limited attention. Therefore, this study aim to be a contribution to the understanding of female terrorism, and of terrorism in general. By studying gender structures and gender ideology of

jihadist ideology, representative cases from the last two decades whilst applying a typology created by one of the leading experts on jihadist terrorism in Europe, the research aims to contribute to the understanding of female jihadism and provide insight into how jihadist women in Europe is a growing phenomenon and why our understanding of terrorism should include a gender perspective. The design of this research, as described above, is comprised of several cases of female jihadism in Europe from the last two decades. I decided on three criteria for choosing which cases to include in the analysis. First, the women in each case had to have been sentenced, and found guilty, in a criminal court. Additionally, the cases had to be related to jihadist terrorism, preferably cases where the women had been sentenced on terrorist-related charges. One of the cases is an exception, where the subject was charged with attempted murder. The woman was nevertheless inspired by jihadist ideology to commit the crime, and therefore, this research considers her a female jihadist. Second, the cases had to be European, meaning the women had to be based in Europe, the crime was planned and/or committed in Europe and the women were sentenced by a European court. Third, the cases had to have occurred between the year of 2000 and 2018.

#### **4.4 Data collection methods**

In order to conduct a study, the researcher needs to collect information on his or hers research area, so-called data. According to Bryman (2012), there are different types of data and different ways of collecting them. Primary data is data collected by the researcher, for instance from interviews, whilst secondary data is already existing data which has been collected and interpreted by someone else in the past. For this study, the data collection started after reviewing the literature which led to the creation of the research question. This study relies on both secondary and primary data, which combined result into triangulation and refers to using more than one method of data in the study of a social phenomena. Triangulation can help identify strengths and weaknesses of each method in researching a phenomena, and if two methods indicate the same results, it strengthens the research's credibility (*ibid.*: 383-386).

Secondary data has already been collected by other researchers and the data has been *interpreted* (Dalland 2012). An advantage of using secondary data is that it saves time and costs. Additionally, it can be used to compare data over time (e.g. longitudinal studies). For this study, secondary data was not only beneficial but also completely necessary, due to the complexity of

the topic and limitations in terms of available informants. Due to security obstacles, the timeframe and lack of accessibility to actual individuals with first-hand knowledge, interviews with the female jihadists themselves was not a viable option for this study. These women are, not surprisingly, not easily accessible and they are often part of networks that can be considered quite dangerous. Therefore, this research relied heavily on former studies conducted on this topic, and on women connected to terrorist networks. Primary data is new data collected by researchers themselves. Primary data is any information that has not been interpreted or analysed by other researchers. In qualitative research, the dominant method of collecting primary data is through interviews. Yet, primary data can also be in the form of news articles (at the time of an event), autobiographies, original documents e.g. law documents or personal journals, letters and audio and video footage. The primary data of this study consist of one expert interview, published interviews with female jihadists (conducted by others), audio recordings and news sources.

#### **4.5 Expert interview**

I conducted a telephone interview with one of Europe's leading experts on jihadist terrorism in Europe, Petter Nesser, who also created the typology which was applied as a framework in the analysis of the individual women in the case studies. Telephone interviews have been relatively common in quantitative research but not so common in qualitative research (Bryman 2012: 484). There are numerous challenges to keep in mind when using this method of interviewing. First, the researcher does not get to witness and observe the setting in which the interviews takes place, and therefore not the body language of the interviewee. Second, technical obstacles could arise, such as bad connection or troubles recording the interview. Third, it is easier for the interviewee to abruptly end the interview if she or he wants to. Still, there are nevertheless benefits of doing telephone interviews. It is cost-effective, and cheaper than compared to face-to-face interviews and it is time-effective. It can also be effective in the sense that the interviewee may feel less stressed and anxious when the interviewer is not physically present, and still deliver comprehensive and expansive replies (*ibid.*:). In this case, a telephone interview felt pertinent considering this was an interview with an expert whose research I was already quite familiar with, in addition to it being a more formal, or academic, type of interview whereas I believed the observations of the surroundings or his physical responses to my questions would not be crucial for the analysis of the interview.

There are two main types of qualitative research interviews; unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Bryman 2012: 466). Unstructured interviews are quite similar to a conversation, where the researcher asks a question and follows up based on the reply of the respondent with questions that seem relevant. Semi-structured interviews use an interview guide prepared beforehand by the researcher containing questions and topics that should be covered. These questions can be altered and their order adjusted according to the flow and progress of the interview (ibid.: 467). I used a semi-structured interview with a interview guide prepared beforehand. Considering this was an interview focusing on a complex topic with a person whose in-depth knowledge and expertise relating to the research area is extensive, it was important that I as a researcher was prepared and had created questions relevant to his expertise yet also to my research question. A semi-structured interview guide helps the researcher to stay on topic whilst still open up for follow-up questions and more flexibility depending on the replies. The interview took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April in the morning. I recorded the interview with the permission of the interviewee. In the beginning, I asked Nesser questions about the overall situation of jihadism in Europe, and about the different networks and cells operating across the region. Following, he gave me a relatively detailed account of how women had been involved in Europe, from the early 1990's to date. After a while, I directed the questions more towards his typology and how, and if, he believed it could be applied in the study of female jihadists, considering it was created based on data collected on male jihadists. In the end, we talked about the overall threat of jihadism in Europe, now and for the future. My impression was that the interview went well and fluently, Nesser gave extensive and in-depth answers to my questions and the interview lasted for nearly an hour.

#### **4.6 Typology of female jihadists in Europe**

A problem that arises when applying a typology that was created and based on data depicting male jihadists, is that women do not necessarily meet the standards set out by studies of male terrorists (Jacques and Taylor 2013). It also risks falling into the trend of applying gender as a way of describing differences in sexes instead of as an analytical tool in describing relationships of power and structures. On the other hand, considering studies on male and female terrorists have shown similarities and common characteristics between the genders, using an already existing typology can be beneficial. It not only provides the researcher with a framework that is

already based on extensive data collection from years of research but it also provides an etiology of male terrorists that can be used as a comparison to the female cases to illustrate the relation of gender and power, and the differences in the etiology of male and female terrorists. Simultaneously, it provides a background of how those structures of power in jihadist movements has been, and still is, dominated by men thus making it easier to detect changes or compromises in the gender structures of those movements. Still, considering the analysis of this study is to a great extent based on media representations of these women, the descriptions cannot be taken at face value. The mainstream media has, as pointed out by several scholars, a tendency to sensationalize cases in a way that does not include scientific methods of analysis. These representations must therefore be critically analysed and coded, before being applied with an analysis based on a theoretical framework.

#### **4.7 Analysis of qualitative data material**

The data collected for the first unit of analysis in this study consisted mainly of written texts in the form of police reports, academic reports, news coverage and articles of the cases in question, as well as other secondary sources. The second unit of analysis consisted mainly of written texts in the form of interview transcripts, both the one I conducted myself and previous interviews with some of the female jihadists, including police interview transcripts. Unlike the statistical analysis of quantitative data, there are no clear-cut rules for the analysis of qualitative data (Bryman 2012: 570). Qualitative data analysis is more flexible; the researcher usually analyses the data in the same time period as the data collection takes place: impressions, observations, and thoughts from for instance the interviews are usually more vivid and memorable right after the interviews have taken place. Qualitative data material, such as interview transcripts, can amount to a vast number of pages with written words. The purpose of analysis is to uncover patterns in the data. Coding is a common method used to find these patterns (Saldana 2015). A code is a keyword that can describe or characterize a meaning or theme in a given sentence or paragraph in a text. Codes can be descriptive or interpretive: the latter will be subjective as it is the researcher's understanding of the text, while descriptive codes describe the actual content of the text (ibid.: 3).

I used coding in order to determine content meaning and themes. After the expert interview, I transcribed the interview into a text and annotated it, marking relevant information, reoccurring

themes, and overall meanings in the paragraphs. Additionally, I compared the results to the interview guide to assess if I had managed to collect answers to all of the questions. Of course, I had not. In semi-structured interviews, the flow and direction of the conversation will not be known beforehand and the researcher can try to redirect the conversation back to the topic. However, this does not mean that the unintentional change in direction is negative: the interview subject may have additional information or beneficial insight for the study that the researcher did not expect. In regards to the interviews by other researchers with the women of the case studies, I followed the same procedure. I coded the women's statements and replies, trying to find recurring themes and patterns.

#### **4.8 Quality criteria**

Regardless of what type of research design, or methodology, is used in a study, it is necessary to apply some common evaluation criteria in order to measure the credibility and quality of the research (Dalland 2012: 120). In quantitative research, validity and reliability are two essential quality control criteria. The first refers to whether "a measure of a concept really measures the concept", meaning if the research methods are credible and the second refers to which degree a research is replicable, meaning that another researcher should be able to conduct the same study with the same methods and yield somewhat the same results (Bryman 2012: 156-158). The quality of the data collected must be seen in relation to the purpose of the study, which is to shed light on the research question. For data to be valid, it must be relevant for the study. This concerns both the secondary data used such as academic literature and primary data such as the interviewees who participate in the research. Reliability refers to the trustworthiness of the research. It means that repeated measures with the same instrument on a given sample of data should yield similar results, meaning the reliability of a study will be high if one gets similar data when repeatedly collecting data concerning the same phenomenon (*ibid.*:). This is difficult in qualitative analysis, because the researcher is subjective and interpretive in his or hers analysis. Therefore, it is impossible for another researcher to yield the exact same results.

Due to these difficulties, an alternative method of evaluating the quality of qualitative research was introduced by Guba and Lincoln in the 1980's (Morse 2015). Their method introduced an alternative terminology for assessing qualitative research to ensure rigor; trustworthiness and authenticity. In simple terms, they argued that there can be more than one 'truth' in the study of

the social world, and therefore rejecting the presupposed idea of one ‘absolute truth’ replicable by the standard criteria of reliability and validity as prevalent in quantitative research (*ibid.*:). Nevertheless, while the actual analysis of a topic in qualitative studies will differ in terms of analytical methods, it should be possible for another scientist to replicate the same findings. Qualitative researchers do not use the same instruments to measure validity and reliability so therefore, they introduced the method to ensure that the research is credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable. If these four criteria are established in a qualitative study, the overall trustworthiness of the research is ensured (*ibid.*:).

#### **4.9 Limitations of the data collection**

The main limitation is the fact that the persons in question being studied, the female jihadists, are being studied from the outside based primarily on data from other sources than the actual women themselves. As mentioned, interviews with these women was not an option for this study which limits the contribution of this research in terms of understanding these women from their own perspective. I chose to focus on collecting data from both secondary and primary sources already available instead of conducting my own interviews with scholars, experts or people with knowledge of this topic. I decided on this approach for two reasons. First, I believed that if I could not hear it from the individuals in focus themselves, the female jihadists, it would be beneficial to dedicate that time to locate sources whom had already done this, for instance through interviews. Second, the vast amount of information and published scholarly research available regarding this topic, led me to the decision that conducting my own interviews would not necessarily benefit my research as this information could already be found in the existing literature. However, I conducted one interview with a renowned expert on terrorism, Petter Nesser, as this study relies heavily on his typology and published works. The decision of not including more informants may have limited my data collection, as I have no way of knowing if, and what, these individuals could have contributed to the research. Nevertheless, I do not believe this approach affected the credibility of my research as I applied multiple other primary and secondary sources.

## **Chapter 5: Analysis of Case Study**

This chapter will analyze five representative cases of female jihadism in Europe; two from the generation of al-Qaeda followers and three from the new generation of Daesh followers. These women were part of different terrorist networks, they operated in smaller entities, and some operated on their own. This chapter will present the analysis of the collected secondary and primary data, which combined makes up the foundation for answering the research question of this study:

*How and why has the role of jihadist women in Europe  
changed over the last two decades?*

The analysis draws on the literature presented in chapter two, the theoretical framework presented in chapter three combined with primary data collected from expert interview, news articles and media representations of jihadist women. The first part will focus on the era of al-Qaeda from 2001-2013. An overview of the organization will be given with an emphasis on its gender ideology and gender structures. Following, two representative cases will be presented and analyzed using Nesser's typology. The second part, following the same outline as the first part, will move on to present the era of Daesh from 2013-present. The third and final part of this chapter will present a comparison of the cases to illustrate how and why the role of female jihadists have changed from the era of al-Qaeda to the era of Daesh.

### **5.1 Genesis of al-Qaeda**

Religious traditionalism in the Middle East has seen revitalization since the 1960's, with Saudi Arabia's Wahhabism as the most impressive example (Mouline 2015). Traditionalism was a

reaction to defend Islamic values and beliefs against an increasing modernity that swept through the Islamic world in the beginning of the last century. The regime in Saudi Arabia established itself as a forerunner for Islam and traditional values by creating an idea of “Muslim solidarity”(ibid.). Multiple religious, political, economical and social organizations were created, such as the Muslim World League and Islamic Universities throughout the country. Islamism, or political Islam, dates back to the decline of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th century (Bunzel 2015: 7). The first modern and influential political Islamic organization was the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and abolition of the Islamic Caliphate in 1924. The Muslim brotherhood was a political movement bent on winning power and influence in the Egyptian society. An exclusively Sunni organization, it emerged as a response to Western imperialism and the decline of Islamic identity in public life (ibid.). The Brotherhood’s ideology can best be described as revolutionary Islam, while Wahhabism, or Salafism, from Saudi Arabia, was a fundamentalist and purist version of Islam. The combination of these two school of thoughts gave birth to the jihadist ideology (Nesser 2015: 32).

For decades, jihadists focused their attention on ‘the near enemy’, usually conceptualised in dictatorial and tyrannical regimes in Arab nation states. Jihadism evolved after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1989; ‘the distant enemy’, or Western hegemony, became its new target (Nesser 2015). In the last year before the fall of communism, a group of jihadists formed an organization which would eventually come to be the dominant promoter of global jihad. Al-Qaeda was founded in Peshawar, Pakistan, as an Arab paramilitary organization in 1988 (ibid: 27). The organization was set up by a small group of ideologically devout jihadists, including the Saudi millionaire, Osama Bin Laden. The mission of al-Qaeda was to carry the banner of jihad, overthrow Arab dictators, free Muslims from foreign occupation, liberate Palestine and finally, re-establish the Caliphate. From the 1990’s on, Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri propagated the concept of “global jihad” with the intention of deterring the West from interfering in Muslim affairs. The leaders built a hierarchical organization with “a central leadership, an advisory council, and committees overseeing different functions and activities such as military, religious and financial affairs, as well as media and propaganda” (ibid.:).

The September 11, 2001 attacks galvanized global attention, and overnight al-Qaeda became the most infamous terrorist organization in the world. The United States responded by initiating an international military campaign against Afghanistan which became known as the War on Terror. The concept of “global jihad” became increasingly internalized by extremists around the world after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by a US-led military coalition. The Iraq war devastated the region, and hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed in the first years of the war (Rumman & Abu Hanieh 2017: 33). As with Palestine, Iraq became a symbol of the atrocities Muslims were facing around the world at the hands of the *infidels*, and jihadists used it to justify their cause and further propagate their ideology. The war in Iraq shifted the focus of jihadists from focusing on “the near enemy” to “the distant enemy” even further than before (*ibid.*: 33).

## **5.2 Female jihadism**

Female jihadism evolved over a series of historical events, political conditions and social transformations in the Arab and Muslim world, simultaneously as jihadism formed as an ideology as a result of colonialism and Western imperialism (Rumman & Abu Hanieh 2017: 31). The jihadist woman became the very symbol of the Islamic identity; the mother who raised her children on a ‘jihadi education’. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and for the following decade when jihadist movements began to evolve and expand, as did female jihadism. During this time, jihadist women occupied traditional roles as supporters and facilitators, and of course, as educators of a new generation of jihadists. But this was also a time when female jihadism went through processes of debate, ideologization and a stage of redefinition of the role of women in jihadist movements (*ibid.*:). As Islamic feminism emerged in the Arab world in the 1990’s, so did jihadist feminism. Female jihadists began to question their own identity and their own role in the jihad. As did jihadist ideologues, evident in the contemporary literature on jihad (see Chapter 2). Still, ‘jihadist feminism’ was (and still is) different than Islamic feminism. The first rejected Islamic feminism as they considered it to be blasphemous, apostate thinking that deviated from the fundamentals of Islam, and claiming it to be a result of Western external influence (*ibid.*:20). For instance, contrary to jihadist feminism, Western feminism applauded and promoted sexual openness and sexual equality, which to many women from conservative cultures, could feel uncomfortable and in contrast to their understanding of sex and intimacy as a private matter confined to the home. The sexual expectations of women in Western societies collided with the values and traditions of Muslim women which in turn could lead to the opposite

of empowerment and equality for them; that they felt harassed and restricted in their own societies. Therefore, in a sense, jihadist feminism argued that it could release them from these sexual expectations, and from being treated as sexual objects (Saltman & Smith 2015: 17-18).

The clerical divide regarding women's participation in violent jihad also influenced jihadist feminism, and the women of al-Qaeda, in the beginning of the 21st century (Davis 2017: 86). Al-Qaeda's then-leader Osama Bin Laden was a strong opponent of women's direct participation in violence whereas other ideological leaders in the group called on women to join the holy war (*ibid.*:). In 2004, the online al-Qaeda magazine Al Khansaa illustrated this duality by issuing a statement that read;

“A woman in the family is a mother, wife, sister, and daughter. In society she is an educator, propagator, and preacher of Islam, and a female jihad warrior. Just as she defends her family from any possible aggression, she defends society from destructive thoughts and from ideological and moral deterioration, and she is the soldier who bears (the man's) pack and weapon on his back in preparation for the military offensive” (*ibid.*:).

In other words, the messages by ideologues on the permissibility of jihad for women, could be argued to have been of such contradictory character that interpreting them in favor or against would ultimately be up to the observer. Still, the majority women of al-Qaeda, and affiliated individuals, were predominantly assigned to supportive and logistical tasks, up until the mid-2000's. In 2005, Muriel Decaque became the first European suicide bomber for al-Qaeda in Iraq. As Gentry & Sjoberg (2011) have pointed out, al-Qaeda became a networked transnational constituency rather than a monolithic, international terrorist organization with an identifiable command structure from the mid-2000's on (*ibid.*: 14). In some instances, affiliated groups and individuals did not wait for the theological or ideological justification, or even approval from high-ranking individuals of al-Qaeda central, before including women into their terrorist activities. On the other hand, al-Qaeda has in theory and practice up until present day, been the jihadist organization that has utilized the fewest female terrorists. The exceptions therefore attracted widespread media attention and confusion, particularly in Western mainstream media (Davis 2017: 87-89).

### **5.3 Representative cases**

In the European context, the female jihadists often come from social backgrounds rooted in Western culture, wherein gender equality and feminism conceivably have a stronger influence than in more traditional and conservative cultures. This may be a contributing factor to why some European female jihadists have overcome the doctrinal hurdle that limits their participation in jihad, particularly when combined with more contemporary interpretations by ideologues on the matter of female jihad. The women may reject ‘feminism’ as it is conceptualized in the Western world but the influence it nevertheless may have had on their identity formation during their upbringing and in social life, could have transferred onto their new jihadist identity. Therefore, the female jihadists in Europe should be understood based on their unique context as they may differ significantly from female jihadists in other parts of the world.

The era of al-Qaeda refers to the period when the organization was the dominant actor in the global jihadist movement, between 2001-2013. Below two examples from the generation of female al-Qaeda followers in Europe will be presented. It is important to bear in mind that individual cases are always unique, they have their own context and the circumstances revolving the women will differ from case to case, whether it be individual ones or external ones. Nevertheless, the cases involving jihadist women will still share certain similarities because they are driven by a common objective and common motivator; the jihadist ideology. The first case covers probably the most famous female jihadist in Europe, who was convicted on terrorist-related offences in 2010. The second example differs significantly in terms of context, and is a case of attempted murder.

#### *5.3.1 Malika El Aroud*

Malika El Aroud is one of the most prominent female faces of global jihad (The New York Times 2008). She is well known in jihadist movements around Europe, particularly to other women, and to law enforcement officials. She has been arrested several times, most notably for propagating jihadist ideology online and in 2010, she was sentenced to eight years in prison. Malika’s pathway to becoming “Europe’s most dangerous woman”, a title given to her by Western media, began in her early twenties (*ibid.*).

Malika El Aroud was born in Tangier, Morocco in 1960. Her family moved to Brussels in 1965, and Malika adapted into life in the West (CNN 2006). Her family were quite conservative, and her upbringing was strict. By the time she reached high school age, she began to rebel against her strict homelife. She was expelled from school for striking a teacher whom she claimed had used a racial slur towards her. Following her expulsion, she began experimenting with drugs and alcohol, and became part of the Belgian nightlife. At one point, she tried to commit suicide with a drug overdose (*ibid.*:). According Rumman & Hanieh (2017), she became pregnant out of wedlock at age 18. The same year, she married into an unhappy union, and ultimately filed for divorce two years later. This event, combined with the memories of her suicide attempt, was a turning point for El Aroud, and she began a religious life. She began exploring a fundamentalist version of Islam, which she would later embrace completely. Her attire changed to modest traditional Islamic clothing and she began to attend religious meetings and gatherings. In a rare interview, El Aroud herself explained when her embrace of jihadism fully internalized and why:

“God gave me guidance, I was mature and had a daughter. I was seeking to learn more, which brought me closer to my sect. This was in 1991 when I began to follow international events more closely. I was finding that nothing has changed with the Palestinian cause, and afterwards I learned about the war in Chechnya where the hypocrisy of the international community became more evident to me. This led me to discover that I belong to an Ummah “nation” that has been fought since the dawn of Islam. I was ignorant about everything in Muslim history, which made me feel guilty. I began to search and I had no more doubt that the war against Islam and Muslims will never end. With years, I began to notice this war developing more and more; the Jews in Palestine, the Russians in Chechnya and Afghanistan, in addition to the sanctions against Iraq where over a million children have died, while the world’s public opinion remained silent” (al-Khudhairi 2010, cited in Rumman & Abu Hanieh 2017: 328).

In 1991, same year as she turned towards jihadism, El Aroud met her future husband, Abdessatar Dahmane (Cruickshank 2009). He was a tunisian loyal to Osama Bin Laden. They married in 1999 but her husband left to receive combat training in Afghanistan already in 2000. El Aroud would eventually follow her husband to Afghanistan, and observe al-Qaeda upfront and close while she lived with other women, wives and families of other al-Qaeda fighters, in Jalalabad. According to a 2006 CNN interview, El Aroud had been shocked to see the poverty and devastating effects

of the continuous civil war that had worsened a few years earlier after the Taliban took power. El Aroud, and her associates, blamed the United States and the West, for meddling in Afghanistan's internal affairs. In 2001, two days shy of the September 11 attacks, her husband carried out a suicide attack while posing as a journalist in an interview with a Afghan anti-Taliban warlord, Ahmed Shah Massoud (*ibid.*:). When the United States invaded Afghanistan, El Aroud fled Jalalabad but was captured by Massoud loyalists and detained for three weeks. Belgian authorities managed to secure her release and she was returned to Belgium where she was tried alongside several others for the Massoud assassination. She was acquitted based on the lack of evidence and for her own testimony claiming she was in Afghanistan on humanitarian grounds. El Aroud was now back in Belgium not only free but also as a "wife of a martyr". This boosted her confidence and she began rallying for al-Qaeda in the online sphere under the name 'Oum Obeyda'. (Rumman & Abu Hanieh 2017: 328-329).

She met her second husband, Moez Garsallaoui, in an online jihadi chat forum. He was a political refugee in Switzerland. El Aroud and Garsallaoui married in 2003, and moved to a Swiss village where they ran multiple jihadi online websites. El Aroud was already a known jihadist to law enforcement in several countries, and her new life in Switzerland, particularly her online activity, was being closely monitored by Swiss authorities. She was ultimately arrested in 2005, and sentenced to a six-month suspended sentence for operating a pro-Qaeda website. Her husband was released after three weeks, but disappeared at the same time as she returned to Belgium (*ibid.*: 329). El Aroud received much attention from the media who all wanted to interview al-Qaeda's most prominent female representative in Europe. Simultaneously, she rallied for the cause online. Throughout the 2000's, she was charged and tried several times for terrorist-related offences, including spreading pro-Qaeda propaganda and for recruitment to a terrorist organization (The New York Times 2008).

Malika El Aroud represented a shift in European female jihadism in the 2000's. She was public and visible, outspoken and fearless in her activism for al-Qaeda. She operated as a unofficial European spokesperson for one of the world's largest male-dominated terrorist organizations. In the public media discourse, El Aroud was treated somewhat different than previous female terrorists. She was given biased nicknames and presented in the media as "unique" given her sex yet she was also treated to a certain degree as a political agent. She spoke proudly of her role as a

female jihadist and “placed the role of female jihadists, indirectly, in the same parallel position to that of male jihadists” (Rumman & Abu Hanieh 2017: 331). It also appears she was not threatened by the fact that she was a woman operating in a male-dominated, and male-centric, environment. In a 2008 interview, she stated that "normally in Islam the men are stronger than the women, but I prove that it is important to fear God - and no one else" (The New York Times 2008).

### *5.3.2 The Entrepreneur*

The first impression after studying El Aroud is that she fits best into the entrepreneur category in Nesser’s typology. But after a closer look, the formation of her jihadist identity also shows signs of characteristics from several of the other categories. El Aroud came from a troubled background, and formed a new identity when she discovered religion. She was influenced by several ideologues and male figures after she became religious, and first became affiliated with al-Qaeda through her first husband, Dahmane. In Afghanistan, she witnessed the injustices suffered by Muslims, and the long-lasting effects of the Afghan Civil War. After her husband’s death as a suicide martyr, she returned to the country where she grew up, Belgium, and resumed her life there yet now with an additional role which influenced her identity; a widow of a martyr. Her dedication to al-Qaeda increased and she began her online career as an activist for the group.

From what we know, for a time she had no male figures in her life until she met her second husband. During that time, she continued as a prolific voice for the jihadist cause, created and operated several pro-jihad websites and earned an esteemed status in jihadist circles (Cruickshank 2009). Her activism reached across continents and attracted followers worldwide. In other words, El Aroud did not receive any endorsement from any man in her life yet created her own platform to promote violent jihad. El Aroud’s messages were political and she used her voice to express her grievances against the Western regimes she believed to be responsible for the suffering of Muslims. She also had personal experience with law enforcement and the Belgian legal system, whom she accused of trying to silence her. At the same time she knew the system, making it easier for her to stay within the legal boundaries. El Aroud never committed any violent acts herself. She did however promote the ideas and beliefs of violent jihad, and rallied her “brothers and sisters” to join the fight. Hence, she was a participant in terrorist activity, as a recruiter and propagandist. As she stated in 2008, “it is important that I am a

woman. There are men who don't want to speak out because they are afraid of getting into trouble. Even when I get into trouble, I speak out" (The New York Times 2008). El Aroud was uncompromising of her own agency as an active participator in violent jihad.

### *5.3.3 Roshonara Choudhry*

In 2010, a young girl walked into an office in London, with an appointment to see her local Member of Parliament (MP), Stephen Timms. As he greeted her, she stabbed him several times in the stomach with a kitchen knife until she was restrained. Timms barely survived the attack. In the initial stages, it was first assumed to be a case of mental illness, but when police began questioning the young woman, it quickly became evident that she was an Islamic extremist (The Guardian 2010a). Her name was Roshonara Choudhry and she was a 20-year old former English and Communications student at King's College London. After her arrest, she explained in the police interview that she had decided to target Timms for his support of the 2003 Iraq war (*ibid.*:). When asked how she felt about what she had done, she replied that "I feel like I've ruined the rest of my life. I feel like it's worth it because millions of Iraqis are suffering and I should do what I can to help them and not just be inactive and do nothing while they suffer" (The Guardian 2010b).

Throughout the interview, it became clear that Choudhry had spent months listening to jihadist ideologues and reading content on extremist websites. Two ideologues in particular seemed to have inspired her to commit the attack (Pearson 2015: 9). Anwar Al-Awlaki was an American-Yemeni jihadi ideologue whose video sermons constituted the majority of the extremist content Roshonara consumed online. She watched and listened to his sermons for hours and hours, and became increasingly radicalised in the months prior to the attack. When she was asked if it was a particular incident or a gradual process that led to her decision in committing a violent attack, she responded that "after like listening to the lectures, I realised by obligation but I didn't wanna like fight myself and just thought other people should fight, like men, but then I found out that even women are supposed to fight as well so I thought I should join in" (The Guardian 2010b). Awlaki was in fact not supportive of women in violent jihad but rather advocated a supportive role for women (Pearson 2015: 8). He was nevertheless ambiguous in his messages, making room for personal interpretation. It was when Choudhry began listening to Abdullah Azzam, that she found the ideological justification she needed for her joining violent jihad. She interpreted

Azzam's messages of fard a'yn, which obligates every Muslim to go out and fight if a Muslim land is attacked, as a sign; Iraq had been attacked and therefore she was obligated to join the fight (ibid.:).

According to the dominant narrative, Choudhry's case was unique. She was characterised as a rare "pure lone wolf", resulting from a solitary online radicalization (Pearson 2015: 4). There were no indications that she was part of a larger cell, network or even online community; the police investigation discovered no online communication with others, simply downloaded content on her computer (ibid.: 5-6). In the interrogation, she repeatedly claimed she was working alone, that she had not discussed her plans with anyone else and that she was solely inspired by online content, and not by anyone in person. Choudhry was third-generation British-Bangladeshi and grew up in a religiously moderate family in a London neighbourhood. Her family struggled financially and Choudhry worked as a part-time tutor to help support her family (ibid.: 13). She allegedly dropped out of university a few months prior to the attack partly because her university had granted an award to the former Israeli president, Shimon Peres, in addition to feeling that the university was anti-Muslim (ibid.: 15). By the time of the attack, her father was unemployed and the family relied on state benefits. One of the arguments to have her tried as mentally fit was that she paid off all of her student loans before the attack, symbolizing that she did not want her family to have to take on the burden of her debt. The attack was meticulously planned and Choudhry was given a life sentence, with a recommendation that she serves minimum 15 years, in November 2010 (The Guardian 2010a).

#### *5.3.4 The Protégé*

At first glance, Roshonara Choudhry does not fit into one of the categories of Nesser's typology of jihadists in Europe. She does however show characteristics from several of the categories. Choudhry was a well-educated student with excellent grades before she dropped out prior to the attack in 2010. She came from a humble background but had no prior interactions with the law or any serious social troubles. She worked as a tutor at a youth center and was dedicated to her family. In Nesser's typology, neither the misfit or drifter can describe Choudhry. First of all, from what we know she had no social connection to anyone in extremist networks. There was no social or familial incentive in her life to prompt an interest in jihadist ideology. Second of all, she had shown no signs of violent behaviour or any significant troublesome characteristics before the

year of 2010. Third of all, according to Choudhry herself, there was no personal grievance or seek for redemption that led to her actions. She was in fact motivated by a strong sense of justice. Her driving force was the persecution and injustices suffered by Muslims, especially in Iraq. Her actions were political. Additionally, in a sense, she had two mentors; Awlaki and Azzam. She admired and idealized their messages, and through them, she began to embrace militant ideology. Therefore, despite not being part of a cell or having had any personal direct contact with entrepreneurs, the closest category she fits into, is the protégé.

The dominant narrative about Choudhry's case was that she was a lone-actor, or a 'lone wolf' (Pearson 2015). Lone-actors have become an issue in the anti-terrorism discourse because of the very nature surrounding their profile; they act alone and therefore are harder to intercept beforehand. Most of them are socially isolated and plan their attacks meticulously over time (Leenars & Reed 2016). There has been multiple attacks by so-called lone wolfs with little or no known connection to extremist networks in recent times. They have operated on their own, often inspired by or sympathetic to a cause or a group (*ibid.*:). Yet, the dominant conceptualisation of the lone-actor phenomena presents as problematic if one analyze a lone-actor like Choudhry as a protégé through Nesser's typology. In her case, she operated alone and was inspired by an ideology, but considering large amounts of extremist propaganda and narratives are distributed and shared online in today's world in addition to extremist ideologues calling for their followers to 'take up arms', concluding that a perpetrator of a lone-actor attack is just that, a lone attacker, can limit the investigations of how jihadist movements are pragmatically utilizing modern communication tools to influence their followers and strengthen their mobilization (Foreign Policy 2017). Therefore, examining Choudhry as a protégé instead of a lone wolf could help illustrate the power these ideologues possess, and how their messages and propaganda could be interpreted by sympathizers and potentially, result in attacks perpetrated by lone actors. Thus, if the dominant narrative treated Choudhry, and other solo attackers inspired by the same cause, as participating actors in a global transnational movement that does not fit into the conventional theories of social movements with a proper structure in place but rather as a modern movement that has revolutionized terrorist recruitment, radicalization and mobilization in the digital age, the scholarly understanding of terrorism and terrorists would benefit.

### *5.3.5 Two women, same cause.*

In the case of Choudhry, her online self-radicalization prompted questions by radicalisation and extremism experts as to how she became radicalised without any external guidance, except for online content. In Pearson's view (2015), Choudhry's actions problematize current mainstream conceptualizations of violent radicalization. Radicalisation has been understood as a collective real-world phenomenon, which Choudhry's case contradicts. She was not part of a cell or a network, she had no contact with extremists or recruiters, she did not come from a troubled background, she was not uneducated and she believed she, as a woman, had the right to contribute to the jihad cause (*ibid.*: 6). Gender structures did not limit her in her online radicalisation, arguing that extremism is not always a result of social or collective influence, as many theories suggest. It is noteworthy that both Choudhry and El Aroud utilized the internet as a facilitator for each of their missions yet in very different ways. El Aroud propagated extremist views well aware that it was public and she was being surveilled by law enforcement. She also knew that her peers could object to her activities, especially given her gender. But she claimed her role, and was proud of her identity as a 'female warrior' for al-Qaeda. Choudhry was secretive about her plans, determined and appeared ideologically reflective, according to the police transcripts. According to media coverage of the event, she appeared to have come to the realization that she could commit a violent act justifiable by jihad based primarily on the interpretation of *two* ideologue's sermons, al-Awlaki and Azzam (The Guardian 2010a). In the police interviews, she stated that she had listened to over one hundred hours of jihadi sermons. From those, she became convinced that her attack on Timms was justified and that her being the perpetrator was justified. This reflects a deep determination and possibly a desire for agency, which the majority of jihadi ideologues would not have been able to give her. In other words, the dominant discourse concluded that Choudhry interpreted al-Awlaki's messages as a confirmation that she had the right to claim agency in the name of jihad.

The coverage of Choudhry's crime revealed a problematic "gender-blindness" by the media and to an extent, academia. The dominant focus in the news representations of Choudhry focused primarily on the effect al-Awlaki's messages had had in 'brainwashing' the young student to commit an attack. The media therefore placed the responsibility indirectly on Awlaki, and not on Choudhry. She was denied responsibility of her own actions and rather portrayed as a manipulated young woman, who was brainwashed into becoming an extremist. The fact that

Choudhry did claim agency in her own actions in the police interviews and presented herself as calm, cooperative and forthcoming was not taken into account. Even the detectives interviewing her had a hard time believing she had planned the attack in complete solitary with no connection or guidance by outside forces. On the contrary, the fact that she interpreted the messages of two highly conservative ideologues to her favor, illustrates Choudhry's determination and her own political agency.

#### **5.4 Contextual influences**

During the era of al-Qaeda, the European continent was going through significant changes, both politically and culturally (EUMC 2006). The first decade of the 21st century was a period of enormous debate regarding terrorism, war, and the security threat posed by non-state actors. The War on Terror that followed after the September 11, 2001 attacks had major global impact on the world economy, security and international cooperation. In terms of cultural and social impact in Europe, it led to a revival of the populist movement, and of nationalism. The multiple terror attacks by extremists throughout the 2000's including Madrid, London, and the murder of Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands, fueled fear and alienation towards the Muslim communities and led to a rise in 'Islamophobia'. Simultaneously, the war in Afghanistan and Iraq created the first wave of refugees into Europe, which also prompted harsh debates on immigration and integration. At that time, the right-wing political parties were in the periphery of the political spectrum yet their influence increased. These parties promoted an anti-Muslim discourse and used Muslim stereotypes and the fear of Islam to strengthen their own political influence (*ibid.*:).

In the popular discourse, the Muslim woman became the very symbol of Islam's oppressive and discriminatory nature, singled out as victims of gender inequality. Ironically, instead of treating them as victims, Muslim women experienced harassment, discrimination in employment and at universities, stigmatization and intolerance not by the hands of other Muslims but by the European communities they were part of (EUMC 2006: 38-40). Islam's oppression of Muslim women was constructed as a social problem, and the image of them as victims became the dominant narrative. As a result, this social problem was used to justify political and legislative intervention in Muslim women's lives, e.g. forbidding traditional attire in public spaces(*ibid.*:). In 2011, France passed a law banning the Islamic veil in public spaces, and Belgium followed later that same year (The Washington Post 2014). Moreover, the interactions between religion

and secularism in Europe had various effects on the relationship between European communities and European Muslims. In some countries, the approaches of enforcing secularism in public life was more distinct than in others, for instance in France and Belgium (Rumman & Hanieh 2017: 340-341). The ‘cartoon controversy’ of 2005-2006, which started when a Danish newspaper published cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad, created enormous controversy and was followed by an intense debate in Europe about the relationship between freedom of expression and religious tolerance whilst receiving widespread criticism from Muslim communities around the world (Gole 2006). Multiple newspapers in Europe reprinted the cartoons in the following years, including the French satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* (Cox 2016).

## **5.5 The new era of Daesh**

In 2017, German intelligence agencies reported that they had uncovered a radical Islamist all-female network consisting of more than 40 women in a small town in Germany. Some of the women were suspected to be wives of imprisoned jihadis (Deutsche Welle 2017). Germany has witnessed a steady growth of jihadism in recent years, as have France, Belgium, and the United Kingdom (Rumman & Abu Hanieh 2017: 336). As mentioned in chapter one (introduction), multiple cases involving young women occurred in these countries from 2015 on, including the first uncovered all-female terrorist cell in Europe. The new generation of European jihadis have largely turned away from al-Qaeda and towards a new actor in global jihad; Daesh. The group’s goal is relatively simple- they want to establish a massive Caliphate, or Islamic State, by conquering territorial areas in Syria, Iraq and Libya whilst at the same time establish terrorist cells around the world in order to expand their influence, and attract more sympathizers (Weiss & Hassan 2015). Since 2013, Daesh has established itself as one of the most attractive and influential groups in global jihad. Initially, the strategy of Daesh differed from that of al-Qaeda in two ways. First, the latter tended to target Europe and the United States, while Daesh did, up until 2015, mainly direct their attacks towards fellow Muslims in the Middle East. Secondly, Daesh was absolutely uncompromising on doctrinal matters promoting an unforgiving strain of Salafi thought. If jihadism was a political spectrum, al-Qaeda would be on the left and Daesh on the right (Bunzel 2015: 9). Yet, the tactics of Daesh changed in 2015, and they began rallying their followers and sympathizers in the Western world to bring violent jihad to the distant enemy of the Caliphate: the West (*ibid.*:).

The year of 2017 was the deadliest in Europe in terms of deaths caused directly by terror attacks, according to Petter Nesser. In the interview conducted with him for this research, he explained that the shift in global jihad came in 2014, after Daesh announced the establishment of their own self-proclaimed Caliphate in Syria and Iraq. This establishment boosted the confidence of jihadist networks in Europe, and of entrepreneurs, whom began mobilizing and recruiting across European countries. The networks and cells grew, and multiple terror plots were in the making. Daesh became infamous for recruiting anyone who wanted to help build the Caliphate and fight their enemies. They rejected the notion of the nation-state, national borders, and even citizenship. Their self-proclaimed worldwide Caliphate was to be unified by religion, not nationalism. They claimed it to supersede all other nation states whilst rejecting the modern international system of state sovereignty deriving from the 1648 Peace of Westphalia treaties (Weiss & Hassan 2015: xvi). Contrary to al-Qaeda in the first era of global jihad, Daesh was heavily invested in recruiting women into their Caliphate, as they viewed women as the educators of a new generation of jihadists and as the promoters of family values and morals. They also valued the advantages women could have in terrorist activity from a security perspective; women were less suspicious and unlikelier to attract attention from law enforcement (Europol 2017).

In the jihadist culture of Daesh, the vision of clearly defined roles for women in state and society, is shared and internalised by both male and female members of the group (Rumman & Hanieh 2017: 123). The vision stems from predetermined roles outlined by Shari'ah law, and this influence on female jihadism encompasses “a radical and violent reclaiming of identity that is hostile towards Islamic feminist discourse that calls for reinterpreting the Shari'ah in regard to women's rights and equality” (*ibid.*:). As mentioned, jihadist feminists rejects Western and Islamic feminism as they believe its core principles have deviated from the fundamentals of Islam. Women actively participate in supportive, administrative and logistical roles in Daesh but are, from what we know, excluded from senior leadership roles. They appear to support this discrepancy in roles (*ibid.*:). Still, the women of Daesh are, as al-Qaeda's Malika El Aroud, proud and outspoken about their roles. They have been engaged in a counter-feminist discourse in social media, contradicting the impression of these women in Western discourse as manipulated, naive, or desperate ‘jihadi brides’. As with many other terrorist groups, Daesh views women participants as an untapped resource and will make concessions in their ideology to attract women into their ranks, and to further their strategic agenda (Spencer 2016: 78).

## **5.6 Representative cases**

The following sections will introduce three European cases from the era of Daesh. Following the declaration of Daesh's self-proclaimed Caliphate in 2014, Europe witnessed a gradual increase in female jihadism in multiple countries (Rumman & Hanieh 2017). Simultaneously, the influx of Western female migrants to Daesh territory in the Middle East prompted security-related concerns for law enforcement and policy-makers. The new generation of female jihadists appears to have moved away from al-Qaeda and towards Daesh, which raises the question of what it is that makes Daesh more attractive to these women than the previous dominant player in global jihad. The following sections below will present three cases of female jihadists from the generation of Daesh; two from the United Kingdom and one from Denmark.

### *5.6.1 Sana Ahmed Khan*

In 2015, 24-year old Sana Ahmed Khan was sentenced to minimum 25 years in prison for the plotting of a terrorist attack in London. She was sentenced alongside her husband, Mohammed Rehman, who went by the alias the 'Silent Bomber' online. They were plotting to blow up a London mall at the 10th anniversary date of the 2005 London Underground attacks, which claimed the lives of 52 people (The Independent 2015a).

Khan came from a multi-religious family and grew up in Reading, London. While growing up, Khan's mother was a school administrator for the Church of England and her father ran a successful taxi company. Her childhood was stable and happy, and she was described by family and friends as a kind, 'bubbly' and outgoing person (The Daily Mail 2015a). She met her future husband, and partner in crime, when she was 16 years old. He was known in his community as a Muslim extremist and members of his family described him a 'low-life' idiot who spent his time drinking and doing drugs. Khan's family disapproved of the relationship, urging her to end it at several occasion. Her mother even threatened to disown her if she didn't. Khan ignored her family's wishes and secretly married him in an Islamic ceremony in 2013 (*ibid.*:). Various media reports claims the couple first became radicalised after marrying, while most suggest Rehman was already exploring extremist ideology prior to the marriage yet some also claims it was Khan who encouraged the couple's interest in jihadist ideology. In the police raid of Khan's house, they found the Quran with underlined passages authorising the use of violence and by late 2014, Khan was praying five times a day and watching Daesh propaganda on her phone (*ibid.*:).

The couple had become heavily involved with drugs sometime before 2013 (The Daily Mail 2015b). Simultaneously, Khan began having a hard time in her social life and at university. During the trial, Khan's mother gave testimony explaining that Khan had moved back home during her studies partly due to the male attention she received at university. According to her mother, Khan was "fed up with all the attention she received from male students which she didn't like at all". She told the court that it made Khan "extremely unhappy" (*ibid.*:). Khan worked as a substitute primary school teacher while finishing her studies. Apparently, it was her salary that paid for all of the utilities to build explosives which anti-terrorism police discovered in a raid on Rehman's apartment. Khan and Rehman lived apart due to their families objections of their union yet plotted and prepared the attack together. Rehman built so-called bomb 'dummies' which he would set off in his garden while filming it. According to multiple news sources, by the time they were apprehended, the couple had already acquired 10 kg of Urea Nitrate, which is a fertilizer-based high explosive (Reuters 2015; Daily Mail 2015; The Guardian 2015).

During their trial, both blamed each other and accused the other one of being the extremist. In a letter sent to the judge presiding over their case, Khan accused Rehman of being 'controlling' and violent, and claimed that her heavy drug use had left her incapable of making any sound judgement. She expressed remorse for her actions, and begged for clemency. She was denied this and given a life sentence, with a minimum of 25 years in prison.

#### *5.6.2 Roweida El-Hassan*

Roweida El-Hassan was a British-Sudanese pharmacist, whom in 2018 was charged and sentenced as a accomplice in the plotting of a terrorist attack in the United Kingdom (Telegraph 2018). El-Hassan was born in Sudan to a wealthy family, and came to the United Kingdom as a young child. She grew up in London, and completed a master's degree in pharmacy at the University College London. She married young and had two children, and she and her husband ran a successful pharmacy in Khartoum, Sudan. El-Hassan's husband was unfaithful, and she returned to London with her two children. She divorced, and began searching for a new man in her life. According to BBC (2018), she wrote on her dating profile that she was looking for "a very simple, honest and straightforward man who fears Allah before anything

else” (*ibid.*:). Additionally, she wanted a man she could vibe with on a spiritual and intellectual level, and someone who would inspire her. El-Hassan, whom was around 33 years of age, met Mohammad Munir, a Eritrean-born man at a Muslim dating website. They started an online relationship, communicating through social media. During this time, before they had met, the couple began sending each other extremist content, including execution videos and propaganda videos by Daesh. This lasted for some time, and after three months, they eventually met in person. According to media reports, Munir was the more extreme of the two. He was the one who began planning an attack. He was communicating online with a suspected Daesh organizer in late 2016. The organizer was using social media to identify possible recruits for a “lone wolf” attack, and Munir had been recommended by a mutual acquaintance. While Munir waited for further instructions from the organizer, he began preparing possible scenarios for an attack (BBC 2018).

El-Hassan master’s degree and training as a pharmacist, included chemical knowledge (The Guardian 2017). According to media reports, the couple discussed how to make the poison ricin, whereas El-Hassan used her chemical expertise to guide Munir in the preparations. The couple also tried to build a pressure-cooker bomb, and when the police raided Munir’s home, they found manuals in how to build explosives and poison, and two out of three ingredients needed to build a high-explosive device called TATP (*ibid.*:). After their arrest, both denied the charges. In January 2018, Munir was sentenced to life in prison with a minimum of 21 years and El-Hassan was sentenced to 12 years in prison with an additional five year probation period. The court stressed that even though Munir was the mastermind, El-Hassan had embraced jihadist ideology and became absorbed by it (BBC 2018).

### *5.6.3 The Drifters*

Based on the media representations of these women, Sana Ahmed Khan and Roweida El-Hassan both share characteristics that fit the category of the drifter yet Khan also shows characteristics of the misfit. Both women became involved with extremism via a social connection to someone who was already inspired by the jihadist ideology. As Nesser (2015) describes, drifters are often at the wrong place at the wrong time or socially connected to the wrong people (*ibid.*: 17). In the case of Khan and El-Hassan, it appears this became the point of entry into extremism. Neither showed any signs of ideological or politicised convictions until they met their partners in crime.

Neither of them had any criminal record or social troubles. Both Khan and El-Hassan had succeeded academically and professionally, and came from privileged backgrounds. Their radicalisations seem to have been a result of external influence by someone close to them, and whilst Khan expressed remorse at her trial, El-Hassan denied the allegations altogether. According to Nesser, drifters could have gone in a completely different direction if they had not connected with the wrong person. In other words, both women could have had different circumstances if they had not met their partners. He emphasised in the interview that to his knowledge, all known female jihadists in Europe can be placed in the drifter category but that there is a general difference between male and female jihadists; the women all tends to be educated and come from relatively steady backgrounds. They rarely presents as socially disadvantaged or troubled. In other words, female jihadists do not appear to become involved in extremism as a result of personal grievances or for redemption for past sins but as a result of other influences.

Khan and El-Hassan's pathways into terrorism both appear to have been influenced by their partners yet regardless of this hypotheses, the women chose to participate in the terror plots. Khan financed the making of the explosives which were to be used for the attack, while El-Hassan used her chemical experience to guide her partner in how to build a bomb. Understanding how and why they became radicalized does not minimize the responsibilities of their actions nor does it justify not treating them as participating agents in the discourse. Of all the news articles reviewed for these case studies, there was not one who did not imply that the primary responsibility was on their male partners, and that the women had been lured into it and manipulated by the men. Regardless if this was the dominant push-factor into extremism, or simply a reason for their initial involvement, understanding and presenting these women as such in the media, reinforces the biased stereotype of women in terrorism as something "abnormal" or as "victims". Simultaneously, it fails to investigate the initial reasons why they were susceptible to form a jihadist identity. The sudden transformation from a moderate religious life to a radical extremist cannot be based solely on one external factor such as a husband or a boyfriend. Failing to consider the different multidimensional factors, such as other push and pull factors, will limit the understanding of the women and prevent any lessons learned for the future cases. These women were not victims, they were active and willing participants, and should be understood as such.

#### *5.6.4 The Danish Terrorist*

In 2016, a 16-year old girl was arrested and charged suspected of plotting to bomb two high schools, including the Jewish school in Copenhagen (Nettavisen 2016). She was only 15 years old when she began to plan the attack. Over the period of a few months, she purchased ingredients to build the same type of explosives as Khan and El-Hassan, TATP. Her parents grew suspicious of her changing behavior and when they found the bomb ingredients in her room, they contacted the police. In 2017, she was sentenced to six years in prison, a verdict the prosecutors appealed. In the appeal, she was given an additional two years sentence. Due to her young age, her name was not released to the public. Her name became known when she sent a letter to a newspaper after her sentencing, wanting to explain her side of the story (*ibid.*:). Most of the media still do not identify her by name considering she is a minor, and this study will follow that example.

The girl grew up in the small town of Kundby on the Danish island, Sjælland. At the age of 15, after vacationing in Turkey one summer, the girl converted to Islam. Shortly after, she began showing an increased interest in the ideology of Daesh. She came in contact with other Daesh sympathizers online, while continuing to do extensive research on the group and in a few months, she was fully absorbed by the ideology. She began the preparations for two attacks; the Jewish school and the high school she had previously attended (BT 2017). She was also in contact with a returned foreign fighter to Syria, whom she later described in social media as her best friend. He apparently provided her with manuals of how to build explosives. According to the girl's former teacher, she had been in and out of trouble for some time, and she had been bullied before she converted to Islam, and this also continued after. In a private conversation, which he recorded, the girl told him that she had been in contact with an organizer from Daesh who had instructed her to wait for 'orders'. She also confessed to him that she was planning something 'big'. In January 2016, anti-terrorism police raided her home in Kundby where they found multiple chemicals and objects for making explosives. A few hours later, the girl was arrested. The following day, the Danish foreign fighter turns himself in and was charged as an accomplice (TV2 2017a). The audio recording was later used by the prosecution as evidence to illustrate the degree of her involvement (TV2 2017b). After the girl's arrest, she was placed in an institution for young offenders while she awaited trial. During her time there, she stabbed a social worker for having been stationed in Afghanistan and Iraq fighting "her brothers and

sisters” (*ibid.*:). This girl is the first female to be sentenced for terrorist-related offenses in Danish history (DR 2017). The recommendations from law experts and psychologists was that the girl was too young to receive a ‘severe’ sentence but in the judges and prosecutors opinion, she was too dangerous and still posed a significant threat to society. As of 2018, she is serving an eight-year prison sentence (*ibid.*:).

#### *5.6.5 The Misfit*

The Danish girl fits into Nesser’s misfit category. She appeared not to have succeeded socially in school and was the victim of bullying. The audio recording suggested that she was hesitant, not overly confident and not particularly ideologically informed but rather seeking some kind of social reward. According to the media coverage, she presented as a young and angry teenager. At the same time, she was the one who made preparations and meticulously planned the attack which shows determination and intent. Misfits become part of militant religious circles primarily as a means to cope with personal problems, according to Nesser. The Danish girl found a meaningful social connection with Daesh, which she did not have from before. Her radicalisation was, as with Roshonara Choudhry, a result of online interaction with jihadist ideology. Still, contrary to Choudhry, the Danish girl was in personal contact with other Daesh sympathizers and also had an accomplice, and confidant, in the Danish foreign fighter. The media coverage of the Danish girl revealed not just a fascination by the public due to the gender of the accused terrorist but also a confusion due to her ethnicity and background. The Danish girl was caucasian and of Danish heritage with no prior connections to religion. Contrary to El-Hassan & Khan, the Danish girl had a long history of social troubles, and was regarded as a troublemaker. After she converted to Islam, the social troubles continued. Her plans of attacking her own school and her classmates shows a desire for revenge, likely as a result of the bullying. In this case, it is conceivable that the Danish girl was prone to extremist narratives as a way of dealing with her personal grievances and that her point of entry was made possible at least partly due to this.

### **5.7 The new vs. old era**

Female jihadism in Europe has seen a revitalization since the generational shift from al-Qaeda to Daesh. Not simply in numbers but also in methodology. As the case studies above has illustrated, each case is unique in terms of context, methods, individual push and pull factors, and outcome. There is also another noticeable factor concerning the cases from the Daesh era; they were all

uncovered before the attacks could take place. To date, there is not a single successful terrorist attack perpetrated in Western Europe by a female jihadist that led to fatalities. Yet, their terrorist-related activity has nevertheless been successful in creating fear as well as attracting massive media attention. The numerous cases of arrests and indictments of female jihadists in the Daesh era illustrate the alarming and increasing trend of female participation in terrorist activity, and the influence of jihadist ideology.

In the era of al-Qaeda, the women were, with a few exceptions, primarily in the background of the jihadist movement. They operated as facilitators, supportive wives and mothers, and logistical supporters, but they did so out of sight. That does not mean their roles were unimportant. On the contrary, al-Qaeda's jihadist ideology applauded the jihadist woman, and she was the symbol of the future jihadists to come (Rumman & Abu Hanieh 2017: 31). In the interview with Nesser, he also emphasised this gender relationship in al-Qaeda networks during their era. Women's roles were primarily to take care of the families, and to provide logistical support for their husbands, and the networks they were part of. They were not active operatives or recruiters but rather supporters of the cause compliant with the gender expectations they were ascribed. He noted that the most important exception from the al-Qaeda era he knew of, was the case of Malika El Aroud who operated as an active recruiter. He also stated that there was a change in tactics around the time of the Iraq invasion in which some branches of al-Qaeda began utilizing women as suicide bombers in the Middle East, such as Muriel Degauque, but that this shift did not affect the European networks in the same way. From what we know, they did not recruit women as active operatives, and the majority of women kept their traditional supportive roles. Therefore, the two female jihadists presented from the al-Qaeda era, El Aroud and Choudhry, stand out in two very distinct ways. First, they claimed a role in a cause which at that time was reserved for men and the majority of other women in similar networks operated within the expected boundaries of their ascribed gender roles. Second, they formed jihadist identities that aligns with the characteristics of the two types of jihadists in Europe that was furthest away from what was ascribed to, or expected of, female jihadists; the role of an entrepreneur and the role as a protégé.

The new generation of female jihadists have shown a different profile. The traditional gender restrictions appears to have evolved compared to the era of al-Qaeda. In our interview, Nesser

emphasised the social connections that can be found in the European jihadist networks, particularly between female jihadists and male ones. He noted that in the different cases involving female jihadists, one could nearly always find a connection to a known male jihadists, often in the form of a husband or family member. He gave the example of the all-female cell apprehended in Paris in 2016, in which one of the suspects was betrothed to Abdel Kermiche, one of two young jihadists who attacked a church and killed a priest in Roen, France in 2016 (Telegraph 2016). One of the other suspects was reportedly an acquaintance of Hayat Boumeddiene, the wife of Amedy Coulibaly who attacked a Jewish supermarket in January 2015 (*ibid.*:). Coulibaly was part of a cell that also included Cherif and Said Kouachi, two brothers whom two days prior to the supermarked attack, stormed the offices of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* and killed 12 people in revenge for publishing the controversial cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad (BBC 2015). In other words, as Nesser points out, there is almost always a connection to be found between the cells, and particularly one in the form of a husband or boyfriend that connects female jihadists to a cell. As such, it is reasonable to assume that the men who facilitate the point of entry for women into terrorist plots, for instance with Roweida El-Hassan and Khan, do not uphold the same conservative and strict gender ideology as was dominant in the al-Qaeda era. On the other hand, this change could also be a result of pragmatism. Women come off as less suspicious and they face fewer obstacles in regards to security measures as opposed to men, making them a valuable resource for jihadist groups (Europol 2017:7). Daesh has taken advantage of this untapped resource, evident in their online propaganda specifically targeting women (Winter 2015). Daesh have revolutionized their recruitment methods by utilizing the internet to both establish and strengthen social connections between sympathizers of their cause. The internet serves as a strong facilitator of extremist narratives that is widely available. Also, perhaps most importantly, they have called on women to take up arms and launch terror attacks (The Independent 2017). Daesh has selectively applied its gender ideology throughout the last few years, which has made room for interpretation, including women's own definition of their roles. Women who have been brought up in Europe have been educated on women's rights and gender equality which influence how they perceive themselves, their rights and their roles, even within a conservative ideology. This combined with modernised interpretations of the jihadist gender ideology in the era of Daesh have resulted in contemporary gender roles that does not restrict jihadist women to the same extent as it did in the era of al-Qaeda. Female jihadists in Europe today do not have to be confined to supportive roles,

they are in fact called upon to join the jihad. As mentioned in section 5.5, in the study of these women it is important to understand the ideology that attracts them but it equally important to understand the contextual circumstances that has led to their evolving role. The third and final part of this chapter will present a comparison of the five representative cases and illustrate how by analyzing the contextual circumstances in Europe, along with the group level trends in jihadist ideology and its influence on female jihadism, this study found three conceivable factors that can contribute in explaining the evolving pattern of female jihadism in Europe; political grievances, emancipation from gender expectations, and identity.

### *5.7.1 Political grievances*

Jihadists are political. Despite it not being the dominant narrative, so are female jihadists. In terms of European jihadists, there are multiple contextual circumstances that can contribute in the formation of their political conviction. First of all, the injustices suffered by Muslims is not observed simply in the distant areas anymore but also domestically and regionally. The political developments in Europe, particularly the rise of populist movements and the forced secularism on Muslims, could be viewed as a continuation of Western imperialism, not just politically but also culturally. The stigmatization of Muslims and Islam in the European discourse has created an ‘us vs. them’ mentality that is being conceptualised not just in people’s minds but also politically and judicially. The idea that Muslims are under attack, and that the West is waging a war against Islam is one of the key tenets of jihadism. This idea will be easier to internalise if the circumstances could be used to rationalise it. In the case of El Aroud and Choudhry from the al-Qaeda era, the political grievances were based on the injustices facing Muslims in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq. But their own proclaimed roles in the cause differed significantly. El Aroud appears to have been more ideologically conservative, utilizing her own way of fighting jihad which did not contradict the dominant clerical narrative that there is no place for women on the ‘battlefield’. She behaved as an entrepreneur, a propagandist and an influencer while still operating, to some extent, within the jihadist gender expectations. Choudhry on the other hand, contradicted the gender expectations by searching out and finding the justification she needed to ‘avenge’ the injustices suffered by Muslims in Iraq. In other words, both women claimed their agency as political actors yet in different ways.

The women of Daesh come across as different in terms of ideological and political conviction, and based on the sources available, their degree of political conviction was not extensively uncovered during their trials. El-Hassan, who denied the allegations, and Khan, who expressed remorse, both fit into the drifter category of Nesser's typology which can give us an indication of their entry into jihadism yet not the degree of their convictions. According to Nesser, drifters are usually not as ideologically convinced as the entrepreneur or protégé, which seems to fit with the impression of El-Hassan and Khan. The Danish girl on the other hand was initially uncompromising in her political conviction. The audio recording revealed a political devotion, though somewhat hesitant in ideological conviction, thus making it appear that her actions were motivated by sense of justice. Her plan of attacking the Jewish school in Copenhagen fits with jihadist ideology, justifying the targeting of Jews as a retaliation for the oppression of Palestinians by the state of Israel. When her teacher asked her if she wanted her gravestone to read "Here lies the terrorist who killed many innocent people" she replied, "Not terrorist. Freedom fighter" (TV2 2017b). Yet, her plan of attacking her own school signals a desire for personal revenge, and not necessarily political. In all three cases though, neither of the women expressed explicit allegiance to the jihadist cause in the wake of their arrest but two rather expressed remorse, and blamed it on personal grievances, which aligns with Nesser's characteristics of the misfit and drifter. Nevertheless, this could also have been purely strategic in order to attract sympathy from the court.

### *5.7.2 Emancipation from gender expectations*

In European culture, gender expectations of women can easily collide with more traditional notions of gender expectations. In Western feminist discourse, women are applauded as sexual beings and the stigma that once hindered women's expressions of their sexuality, has been challenged and fought to ensure women's empowerment and equality in society. Simultaneously, it has created a culture open to promiscuity, sexual tolerance and sexual expectations. For many women, this is experienced in a negative matter, and as an obstacle in their daily lives. On the other hand, the restrictive gender roles and traditional expectations of jihadist women as mothers, educators or in supportive roles is not necessarily the alternative female jihadists want, or desire. El Aroud challenged the gender expectations of al-Qaeda, and she additionally yet indirectly, placed the importance of women's participation parallel to that of men's. Stating that Muslims, regardless of gender, should fear "Allah and no one else" could be interpreted as she indirectly

rallied women to join the cause regardless of the permissibility laid down by (male) jihadist ideologues. The actual influence El Aroud has had on female jihadism in Europe is unknown but it is not be unthinkable that she has influenced future female jihadists in their own justification for joining jihad despite the clerical resistance.

Choudhry also challenged the gender expectations of al-Qaeda, and did not let her gender restrict her in fulfilling her mission. An interesting aspect is both women's use of the Internet. The online sphere provided a less restricted gender segregation than real-world jihadist engagement, where women were in theory and practice, segregated from the men. It provided a platform where their gender identity was less limiting, and they were freer to engage with jihadist ideology. In a real-world setting, they risked meeting resistance and disapproval of their activities while online they could ignore this resistance if they chose to. It had no real-life impact on them, and they could go about with their business uninterrupted. Yet, El Aroud and Choudhry also differs whereas El Aroud rallied for al-Qaeda online and was a recruiter while Choudhry actually turned to physical violence. Similarly, all of the cases from Daesh illustrate that the women decided to actively participate in the preparation of violent attacks whereas they could have chosen an alternative method of supporting jihad, for instance as El Aroud did. This could suggest that instead of adapting into the gender expectations of their new internalised ideology, they challenged it and sought to emancipate themselves from the prescribed gender roles in a manner that would gain them status within the jihadist movement as fighters or martyrs. On the other hand, the strategy of Daesh, as well as some of their ideologues, have approached the question of female participation in violence differently than the generation of al-Qaeda did, and female jihadism has seen a revitalization in the Daesh era. Hence, their increased participation could signify a changing attitude towards the structures of power in jihadist gender ideology which in turn, emancipates women from the prescribed traditional gender roles.

### *5.7.3 Identity*

As women have traditionally been excluded from jihad, the increasing participation of women in terrorist activity signals three conceivable developments in jihadist ideology, and within the jihadist culture. First, women have been an untapped resource for the jihadist movement, whereas the ideological divide on the permissibility of women in jihad, has prevented groups and cells from utilizing this resource. On the other hand, considering multiple ideologues have

opened up to the idea of women fighting in jihad from 1993 on, and particularly their ambiguous way of presenting this message, could imply that in many instances the gender ideology of these groups is selectively applied to best serve their objective. Second, women themselves are claiming agency in violent jihad. They are doing this despite that the majority of jihadist ideologues are not supportive of their direct involvement in violence which could symbolize a change in attitude towards the gender restrictions of jihadist ideology. Third, it could also be a result of cultural influences from their European context. Women who have been born and raised in Europe will have a cultural understanding of gender equality as something they are entitled to, even if they do not agree with the Western perceptions of what that equality entails. Therefore they may construct their new jihadist identity based on input from both their European roots and their newfound ideological conviction. Still, another important push-factor to emphasise is also the European environment where they formed these identities. As mentioned in both section 5.4 and 5.5, islamophobia in Europe has had a steady growth since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, threatening religious tolerance and democratic values. Islam has been used as a scapegoat in political rhetoric, and Muslims are increasingly experiencing discrimination across Europe. These external factors also influence the formation of jihadist identity.

El Aroud had a radical identity formed by her Moroccan background, Belgian upbringing and jihadist ideology. Her first identity influenced her new identity, even if selectively applied. As gender equality is something that is so rooted in the cultures of Europe, dismissing that already internalised principle, would be difficult. Choudhry too illustrated this after she embraced jihadist ideology by actively seeking for a way to justify her participation in jihad, which she found through interpreting two male ideologues messages in her favor. She was conservative in her ideological beliefs, adhering to the jihadist ideology yet she did not let her gender restrict her in claiming political agency. As stated, women during the era of al-Qaeda were prescribed supportive roles, often as mothers and wives. Choudhry and El Aroud challenged these roles at a time where also the Muslim woman became the very symbol of Islam's oppressive nature in European discourse (EUMC 2006: 38-40). Hence, they also challenged the European idea of Muslim women as oppressed victims who had no influence in a political cause. In other words, the formation of their jihadist identity was influenced by the jihadist ideology but it was also influenced by their own understanding of their gender and identity as Muslim women. El Aroud was explicit about her own position as a "female" warrior, stressing that her gender was

important. She placed women's role in jihad parallel to men's, illustrating a strong advocacy for jihadist women. She also illustrated this by behaving like an entrepreneur, a role typically preserved for influential and charismatic men in terrorist networks. Choudhry, too, formed a jihadist identity influenced by her upbringing in the United Kingdom, her cultural background and her newly embraced ideology. It was also influenced by the environment she was in at university. She experienced King's College as anti-Muslim, and after they awarded a prize to Shimon Peres, she dropped out (Pearson 2015: 15). Her political motive of targeting Timms for his support of the Iraq war can thus appear to have been strengthened due to her impression that her identity as a Muslim had been attacked by the environment she belonged to.

The European discourse on Islam gradually changed between the era of al-Qaeda and Daesh, and increasingly influenced the contemporary political atmosphere all over Europe. It also led to an enforced secularism in multiple countries, including France and Belgium, and debates about identity, integration and culture (Bayrakli and Hafez 2017). In many ways, the Muslim identity came under attack as violent and in contrast to Western values and traditions. This violent identity that was ascribed to Muslims led to an increasingly polarized and suspicious atmosphere. Combined with the forced secularism policies by several European countries, this not only contributed in making certain groups feel marginalised and as outsiders but it also created tensions in and between local communities (*ibid.*: 6). Simultaneously as this fear of Islam gained momentum, Christian identity politics was reintroduced in the political discourse and earned populist parties electoral success across Europe (Politico 2016). Both the United Kingdom and Denmark, where the women from the Daesh era lived, witnessed a change in identity politics (Bayrakli and Hafez 2017).

The female jihadists from the Daesh era formed jihadist identities influenced by the European context in which they lived and their backgrounds. The Danish girl was an ethnic Dane with a Danish upbringing who converted to Islam and then embraced a jihadist identity. She grew up as any other Danish child, influenced by the same culture as her peers. However, in her teenage years she was heavily bullied and had a rough time in school before and especially after she converted to Islam. Her identity before was not accepted by her peers, and neither was the new one. She began searching for social connections who would accept her, and she developed an interest in jihadist ideology (Radio 24 2017). Shortly after, she embraced it completely. She had

found a community that accepted her, and a cause to fight for. In comparison, Khan was the opposite of the Danish girl before her involvement with jihadism. She came from a steady background, was academically successful and popular amongst her peers. She grew up in a moderate multi-religious family. Yet, when she fell in love with her partner who was quite religious, her family and friends rejected him. They did not accept the union and the couple got married in secret. Regardless of the influence he might have had on her radicalisation, or vice versa, the people in their lives before this point did not accept them as a couple which forced them to lead a double life. It was during this time their embrace of jihadist ideology began to fully internalise. El-Hassan came from a privileged background and was academically and professionally successful. She was divorced and a single mother. She was actively looking for a partner, using Muslim dating websites to find a match. After she did, and began exploring jihadist ideology, she used her professional expertise in building a bomb. In other words, she had the capacity to actively participate in the making of a terrorist plot, and she did. Considering El-Hassan did not make any statements during the trial (available to the public), the only information came from the prosecutors and court yet according to them, from the beginning of their online relationship she was explicit about her belief that war against non-believers was justified. Whether she was fascinated by jihadist ideology before she met her partner is unknown but her quick embrace of it suggests a predisposition for internalizing extremist narratives. On the other hand, as a drifter, she could have gone in the opposite way if the circumstances were different. Still, it is conceivable that due to her embracing it so quickly, she had already been influenced by the anti-Muslim rhetoric, and felt that her Muslim identity was not accepted in her society. Consequently, she turned to a cause where she was accepted and could achieve agency.

#### *5.7.4 Concluding remarks*

Nesser's typology is based on extensive research of male terrorists collected over two decades. Creating a similar typology of female jihadists would not be feasible due to the lack of empirical research on these women in addition to the most obvious obstacle; there are not enough subjects to make a comparison of the different types, or categories, of female jihadists. Nevertheless, his typology can illustrate some similar characteristics found with female jihadists, and this study illustrated some of the differences. It is also important to note that Nesser's typology presented some *ideal* categories, and not universal ones. There were common characteristics and similarities between the sample of terrorists in his research but this does not mean that every

single jihadist will fit into one or the other category. It is merely a systematic overview of the different types of individuals, and their characteristics, often found in jihadist networks in Europe. The purpose of this chapter was to present an analysis of female jihadists by using Nesser's typology as the framework to analyze the selected cases of jihadist women in Europe, and evaluate their cases based on the contextual circumstances and the media representations, in order to come closer to an answer to the research question. The idea has not been to provide an in-depth universal explanation of female jihadism or female terrorism. This would not have been possible in this study given the methodology and strategy used to approach the research problem yet the intention was to provide some possible explanations, and descriptions, as to why female jihadism in Europe has increased over the last two decades and how the role of female jihadists have changed. I have tried to illustrate and analyze the cases with a gender-lens by emphasising the relationship between gender and power in jihadist ideology, and the relationship between gender and political agency in terrorism discourse.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The aim of this study has been to explore the evolving role of female jihadists in Europe and analyze multiple representative cases in order to understand why it has changed over the last two decades. The study has provided multiple findings on how the role of female jihadists in Europe has changed from the era of al-Qaeda to the era of Daesh. The cases were placed within a typology framework to assess the different roles of the women, and to extract differences and similarities between them and their respective era. Finally, by addressing the sub-questions of this research, the answer to the overall research question was extracted from the analysis and discussion.

This research finds that the role of jihadist women in Europe has changed on multiple fronts, and for different reasons. First, the traditional gender roles of jihadist ideology, as was dominant in the al-Qaeda era, has evolved in the Daesh era. In the first era, women were prescribed supportive roles which did not include tactical or operational roles. They were confined to roles that aligned with the conservative gender ideology of the era, valorizing women as educators of a new generation of future jihadists and as promoters of family values and morals. Jihadists generally refrained from calling on women to fight in accordance with the doctrinal principles of jihadist ideology. In the Daesh era, the gender ideology has been more selectively applied, and the role of women has evolved to include tactical and operational roles. In addition to hold supportive roles, female jihadists in the contemporary era are prescribed roles as propagandists, recruiters, intelligence gatherers, spies, logistical operatives and warriors. These changes are partly a result of pragmatic strategies by jihadist groups as women have been an untapped resource, and they are valuable in terms of evading security measures and obstacles. Second, the role of jihadist women has also been influenced by jihadist women themselves. They form their new jihadist identity influenced by their background, culture and own interpretation of jihadist gender ideology, and thus redefine the role of the jihadist woman in Europe. As their existing identities are influenced by Western culture, which values the notion of gender equality and female empowerment, these principles appear to influence their new jihadist identity, however

selectively applied. Third, jihadist women have taken a more active part due to political grievances, and a desire to avenge the injustices against Muslims. These women have been affected by contextual circumstances in Europe, which has also influenced the overall mobilization of jihadist networks in the last two decades. The European foreign policies and interventions in the Middle East, the anti-Muslim rhetoric in European political discourse, the electoral success of populist parties across the continent and cultural polarization in European societies has not only gained jihadist groups sympathizers but also facilitated pathways into extremism. Choudhry was influenced by the injustices suffered by Muslims after the 2003 Iraq invasion whilst El Aroud had witnessed the devastations of the civil war in Afghanistan. As section 5.5 illustrated, multiple European countries experienced a boost in jihadist mobilization following the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate by Daesh in 2014 in the midst of the Syrian Civil War. Simultaneously, Europe began witnessing a growth in female jihadism, including Sana Ahmed Khan, Roweida El-Hassan and the Danish girl. Thus, the increased participation of European female jihadists in terrorism is a result of both foreign and domestic influences.

Nesser's typology revealed an interesting and important difference between the selected cases from the two eras. The female jihadists from the al-Qaeda era belonged to the entrepreneur and protégé categories whilst the women from the Daesh era all belonged to the misfit and drifter categories. The research found that this can be explained by the strict gender ideology in the al-Qaeda era, considering female jihadists were in general discouraged from taking active part but rather remain in their supportive roles and thus, El Aroud and Choudhry were rare exceptions who claimed these roles due to the lack of a better alternative. They did not allow their gender to be a hindrance in participating and claiming agency in the jihad cause. In comparison, the female jihadists of the Daesh era did not face the same degree of doctrinal resistance, neither from Daesh ideologues or from their social connections. Yet, male jihadists still represent the dominant types of entrepreneurs and protégé's in Europe and therefore, the female cases we explored were found to belong to the other two categories. The role of female jihadists has evolved yet the unequal gender hierarchy is still very much present. That does not mean that female jihadists from the Daesh era cannot be entrepreneurs or protégé's but it means that these roles will likely not be given to them by male jihadists. On the contrary, the women themselves have to claim these roles, just as El Aroud and Choudhry did.

As the media coverage of El Aroud, Choudhry, Khan, El-Hassan and the Danish girl illustrated, the public do not relate violence to women. Instead they try to produce an explanation that does not deviate from societal expectations of women as peaceful and non-violent, for instance by explaining their involvement as something pathological resulting from personal hardships, tough backgrounds or unhealthy relationships. These are factors that naturally must be taken into consideration in individual cases but the understanding of female jihadists cannot be based solely on these. By applying Nesser's typology, this study has investigated and understood these women from a agent/structure perspective, placing them within a social structure that illustrates the relationship between female jihadists and power in jihadist ideology. Additionally, it has illustrated the tense relationship between these women and the European context.

The multiple case studies of this research has shown that even though female jihadists in Europe are a minority compared to the men, their evolving role and participation signals a development in jihadist ideology and strategy. Women's role in terrorism has too often been dismissed or re-packaged to fit in with the existing conceptualization and understanding of terrorism, which can potentially limit effective responses to the threat of jihadist terrorism. This study has illustrated that female jihadism in Europe is a growing threat to be taken seriously, and that these women must be studied by using gender as an analytical tool in order to understand the different facets of their involvement with, and in, terrorism.

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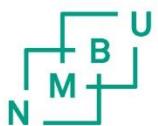
## **Appendix**

### **Interview Guide: Petter Nesser**

10<sup>th</sup> of April, 2018  
(Telephone interview)

Questions:

1. To which degree did women participate in terrorist-related activities in Europe during the al-Qaeda period (2001-2013)?
2. Approximately when did we begin to witness women's participation?
3. Were there specific events that mobilized female participation?
4. Comparing Daesh and al-Qaeda, what would you say is the biggest difference in regards to gender ideology? In what way are they similar?
5. Which changes in jihadist culture over the last twenty years has influenced female jihadism in Europe?
6. To which degree and in what ways has it influenced female jihadists?
7. Law enforcement have said female jihadism is increasing in Europe; why Europe?
8. Are there any countries that are more prone to female jihadism?
9. In your experience, what types of women join the jihadist movement?
10. Your typology; do you believe it can be applied to female jihadists?
11. Can you describe some of the differences and similarities between female and male jihadists?
12. How do you think the future will look like in regards to jihadism in Europe?



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