No Turning Back?
A Case Study of the Norwegian Women in the Islamic State

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No Turning Back?

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Declaration

I, Nina Øie Iversen, 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: ……………………………………………
Abstract

With the rise of the Islamic State (IS) and the proclamation of the establishment of a caliphate in 2014, Western countries have experienced a growing stream of individuals traveling to the area (The Soufan Center, 2017). The terrorist organization has received vast attention for its incorporation of women. Scholars and policymakers have tried to make sense of this relatively new phenomenon of Western women joining a terrorist organization in a different country, making them participants of a global conflict. More recently, the focus has shifted, as the Islamic State has faced major setbacks, losing both territory and power throughout Syria and Iraq, creating an exodus where men and women have returned to their home countries. However, research shows that women return at a much smaller scale than men (ICSVE, 2017). This thesis analyzes the motivations and radicalization process for Norwegian women joining the Islamic State. The research builds its analysis on primary data collected from interviews with the friends and family of these women to assess the processes of radicalization, the reasons behind their departure as well as discuss why none of them have returned. The purpose of this research is to establish an understanding surrounding the phenomenon of female participation in terrorism, and discuss what the Islamic State offer women in comparison to that of the secular emancipation of women.
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Last, but not least, I want to thank Fouad for standing by me and cheering me on throughout this entire process. Your unfailing love and support is what has gotten me through this, and it wouldn’t have been possible without your help.

*Any errors are mine alone.*
### Acronyms and Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AQI</td>
<td>Al-Qaeda in Iraq</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FKTS</td>
<td>Felles Kontraterrorsenter</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICSR</td>
<td>International Centre for the study of Radicalisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICSVE</td>
<td>International Centre for the Study of Violent Extremism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRN</td>
<td>Islamsk Råd Norge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>Islamic State</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISD</td>
<td>Institute for Strategic Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISI</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIL</td>
<td>Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIS</td>
<td>Islamic State in Iraq and Sham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTWJ</td>
<td>Jama’at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PST</td>
<td>Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PU</td>
<td>Profetens Ummah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDT</td>
<td>Relative Deprivation Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RVE</td>
<td>Radicalization into Violent Extremism</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMT</td>
<td>Social Movement Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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## Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abaya</strong></td>
<td>A loose garment, essentially a robe-like dress, worn by Muslim women</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dabiq</strong></td>
<td>Originally: city in Northern Syria, where the battle of the last days is said to take place; In IS-propaganda: Online Magazine published by the Islamic State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fard al-Ayn</strong></td>
<td>Religious duty that must be performed by each individual Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fiqh</strong></td>
<td>The human attempt to understand the divine law (Shariah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hijrah</strong></td>
<td>Originally: migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina; In IS-propaganda: migration to IS-held territories</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hijab</strong></td>
<td>Traditional veil worn by Muslim women, covering the hair and neck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jihad</strong></td>
<td>Struggle; internal or external striving, exact meaning depends on context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jilbab</strong></td>
<td>A simple, loose coat or garment worn by Muslim women which covers the head and body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kunya</strong></td>
<td>An Arabic honorific nickname, usually derived from the first-born child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mahram</strong></td>
<td>Male relatives whom a woman is not allowed to marry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Niqab</strong></td>
<td>Traditional veil worn by Muslim women, covering the hair and face, except for the eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shariah</strong></td>
<td>Religious law of Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sham</strong></td>
<td>Endonym of the city of Damascus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ummah</strong></td>
<td>Worldwide Muslim community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tawbah</strong></td>
<td>To “retreat”, “return” or “regret”. Usually understood as repentance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wallah</strong></td>
<td>Arabic expression; “I swear on God’s name”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘<strong>Xeer</strong>’</td>
<td>Traditional legal system of Somalia</td>
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1 Introduction
The Syrian civil war quickly gained international attention and concern for its political disputes, human rights violations, and sectarian religious violence. Since the protests erupted in 2011 against Bashar al-Assad’s regime, the government in Syria has applied brutal military force to suppress the opposition. The Syrian conflict quickly developed into a multidimensional armed conflict with numerous opposition groups fighting for different causes, creating instability but also opportunities. Thriving from the unstable situation in the country was the Islamic State (IS)\(^1\). The establishment of a so-called Islamic caliphate in 2014 generated attention and interest amongst Muslims worldwide and brought about a historically unprecedented flow of foreign fighters to the area. The entire global Muslim community, the *Ummah*, was encouraged to join the Islamic State by the leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi when the caliphate was declared in 2014. Men, women, and children from all over the world traveled to Syria and Iraq, and a large majority of these individuals ended up in the Islamic State.

The fundamental origins of what is now known as the Islamic State can be traced back to 1999 with the establishment of *Jama’at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* (JTWJ), which later became a part of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) under the leadership of Abu Musa al-Zarqawi (Chatterjee, 2016, p. 203). The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 gave the group eminence in the region, establishing ties with other Sunni insurgent groups and organizations, which led to the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2006. When the Syrian Civil War broke out in 2011, a militant group known as Jabhat al-Nusra traveled to Syria in an attempt to gain control over areas with a Sunni majority population. The leader of Jabhat al-Nusra, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, brought his group and ISI together and formed what is now known as the Islamic State in 2013 (ibid.). In 2014, IS separated themselves from Al-Qaeda and proclaimed the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the Caliph and the rightful leader for Muslims everywhere (Chehab, 2015, p. 29). The success of the Islamic State can be explained by a number of factors such as decades of dictatorship by the Assad

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\(^1\) A few notes on terminology.; throughout this paper, the organization is referred to as “the Islamic State” or “IS” for short, but the group goes by several names; The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), The Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS), or Da’esh, which translates to “one who sows discord” (Neumann, 2016, p. 2; Mirror, 2017). Using the name that the group has given itself is by no means a sign of support, but rather a choice made from the lack of a more neutral term.
regime, the American invasion of Iraq as well as the uprisings during the Arab spring amongst other factors. Islamic State. Having gained control over a significantly large territory and population, the so-called Islamic caliphate quickly developed into a transnational terrorist group in charge of running a functioning proto-state.

The proclamation of a caliphate made the Islamic State unprecedented in comparison to other terrorist groups and can help to explain the major recognition it received from Muslims all over the world. Unlike other terrorist groups, the Islamic State presented itself as a state-building project with the proclamation of the caliphate, and by that creating a plethora of opportunities for Muslims with little or no combat experience. Inviting people of all educational backgrounds, as well as women and families, IS created a unique flow of Muslim migrants to Syria and Iraq. The Islamic State is, therefore, a populist organization, recruiting and inviting anyone who might be willing to join, and tailoring its narrative to fit different groups (Stern, 2016, p. 108). They actively recruit women for their importance as wives and mothers in building a functioning society (Van Leuven et al., p.103-104). Furthermore, as the organization effectively controls territory throughout Syria and Iraq, operating as a quasi-state (Spencer, 2016, p. 74).

The Islamic State’s strategic objective is to re-establish the Muslim Caliphate on earth, as well as running and expanding it (Stern, 2016, p. 107). The ideology of the Islamic State is defined by a distinct Islamic political school of thought, known as Jihadi-Salafism – an extensive and complex ideology within Sunni Islam. The concept of Jihadism and what it entails has been much debated. Sedgwick explains that the term can be used in two ways, where a narrow sense defines it as part of a problem, and a wider sense interprets it as the problem itself and argues that jihadism is best understood as part of a wider problem (2015, p. 34). This thesis uses the concept of Jihadism, and defines IS’ ideology as Jihadi-Salafist for analytical reasons, as the Islamic State clearly encourages jihad (struggle; holy war). According to Bloom, Salafism differs from other interpretations of Islam in its repudiation of all Western creations and beliefs, such as political parties and elections (2011a, p. 20) Furthermore, the ideology can be separated from other Islamic ideologies by three distinct characteristics;

First, Jihadi-Salafi groups are perceived as more extremist and intransigent than other groups. Second, they are said to draw on Salafi or Wahhabi religious tradition and discourse as opposed to the more pragmatic ikhwani ideology and discourse of Sayyid
Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood. Finally they are seen as more internationalist and anti-Western than other groups (Hegghammer, 2009, p. 253-254).

The self-proclaimed caliphate presents an important security threat in the world today, and it is believed that the West will face significant security challenges posed by the Islamic State, its supporters and foreign fighters returning to their home countries (Saltman & Frenett, 2016, p. 144). An estimated 40,000 individuals have traveled from countries around the world to join the Islamic State. Around 6000 of these is said to come from Western Europe² (the Soufan Centre, 2017, p. 11). Still, there are different estimates on how many men and women have traveled to the IS-held territories. These estimates are based on different sources, methods, and definitions of what constitutes a foreign member of the Islamic State. These variations in estimates make conducting any form of comparative analysis difficult. While most research defines men and women traveling to join the Islamic State under the same concept of ‘foreign fighter’, their definitions differ greatly. Moreover, some researchers argue that women cannot be defined as foreign fighters, as they are not known to actively take part in fighting (Musial, 2016/17; Loken & Zelenz, 2017; Perešin & Cervone, 2015). Taking these different interpretations into account, this thesis will adopt the following definition of what constitutes a foreign member of the Islamic State: an individual who “leaves his or her country of origin or habitual residence to join a non-State armed group in an armed conflict abroad” (Geneva Academy, 2017, p. 6).

The phenomenon of foreign fighters is not a new one, nor a uniquely Islamic one. From the Spanish Civil War to the Arab-Israeli war, to the conflict in Afghanistan, people have traveled to participate in conflicts far away from their country of residence. Foreign fighters have been recruited by insurgencies framing the conflict or war as a threat to a perceived common transnational identity community (Strazzari, 2016, p. 52). While the history of foreign fighters may indicate that the phenomenon does not require new interpretation, “the way in which the struggle between the global jihadi movement and the US-led international community has evolved in recent years suggests that an important transformation in the role of foreign fighters has taken place” (ibid.). While foreign fighters in previous conflicts usually only made up a small percentage of the total number of fighters and were relegated away from active combat to more secondary roles in warfare, the Islamic State has attracted foreign

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² This thesis is based on the estimates developed by the Soufan Center in the international context, and on PST’s estimates in the Norwegian context.
fighters from over 140 different countries and many of these hold important roles inside the so-called caliphate. (ibid., p. 53; The Soufan Center, 2017, p. 16). The first accounts on foreign fighters to the Islamic State in Syria in Iraq began to circulate in the summer of 2012 when the first reports on individuals leaving their home countries to support the Syrian people in an uprising against the regime was known (ICCT, 2016, p. 9). What makes the Islamic State remarkable, in comparison to other Islamist terrorist organizations, is the incorporation of people without a military background and women into the group. Presenting themselves as a state-building project, the Islamic State created a plethora of opportunities for foreigners with little or no combat experience. Inviting families and people of all educational background, the group created possibilities for almost anyone within the caliphate, and especially for women, as it allowed for female participation within the proto-state. The incorporation of women into the Islamic State is historically unprecedented, with as many as 550 women from European countries leaving their homes, families, and friends behind to partake in the state building project of IS. As the foreign fighter phenomenon has always been dominated by men, and women have participated on a much smaller scale, the Islamic State constitutes a new aspect of this phenomenon with its high numbers of female members, actively involved in building and expanding the proto-state (Bakker & de Leede, 2015, p. 1).

1.1 Women in the Islamic State
As mentioned, the number of female migrants to the Islamic State is historically unprecedented and therefore seeks special attention. By both actively inviting women to join and at the same time prohibit female fighting, the Islamic State is unique, as few jihadist groups have done both (Sjoberg, 2015). Between 2013 and 2014 there was a huge increase in female travelers to Syria and Iraq, and according to the ISD an estimated 550 women from European countries have made their way into IS-controlled areas (Bakker & de Leede, 2015, p. 3; Hoyle, Bradford & Frennett, 2015). This high number points to a seemingly new phenomenon of Western women migrating to territories under the control of a terrorist organization (Saltman, 2016, p. 147). Neumann explains the high numbers of girls and women in the Islamic State as a consequence of increased female participation in Salafist groups, which have progressed over a long time (2016, p. 119). The fact that the Islamic State presents itself as a state building project is important for our understanding of the high number of female members. This builds on the fact that the Islamic State is not just a terrorist group, but have been relatively successful in establishing a functioning proto-state (Khelghat-Doost, 2017, p. 18). It could be argued that the state-building project of the Islamic State is
what makes it attractive to women, as this allows female participation on a much larger scale
than in other jihadist organizations. As the proto-state invites individuals from all different
backgrounds, and not just those with military experience, women are incorporated into the so-
called caliphate through more subordinate roles as wives and mothers, but also in more active
roles such as medical personnel, educators, police, and recruiters. Women are seen by the
organization as fundamental elements for building an Islamic utopia by providing for their
husbands and raising a new generation of fighters (Saltman & Frenett, 2016, p. 142). Women
engaging in Islamist or Jihadist terrorist groups have often been restricted by strict
interpretations of Shariah law, which puts limitations on female participation in active
combat. Female members of the Islamic State are therefore assumed to be restricted to a more
supportive role, as wives, mothers and home-makers (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p. 7; Sjoberg,

Female participation in the Islamic State creates an uneasy tension for contemporary feminist
and international relations scholars alike, as it appears paradoxical that women from Western
egalitarian societies which emphasizes gender equality would voluntarily join the strictly
gender-segregated organization. In comparison to women in other terrorist organization, the
women of the Islamic State have been fully incorporated into the organization’s various
institutions and are considered a vital part of the survival of the group, raising the next
generation of fighters. However, female participation in IS has become a controversial topic;
the discussion around these women are often characterized by simplification, sexualization
and infantilizing, explaining their participation through a gender narrative that deprives them
of their power and independence (Strømmen, 2018). And while there is no doubt that the
Islamic State adhere to a strict interpretation of Shariah, which puts severe restrictions on
female participation in militant jihad, this gendered narrative takes away women’s
responsibility for participating in the Islamic State. While women’s primary roles are to be a
good wife and raise children, a great number of female IS members also play active roles in
the spreading of propaganda and the recruitment of men and women online, as well as
working in hospitals and schools (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p. 5-6, Winter, 2015, p. 18).
Moreover, women involved in violence are rarely characterized as a normal criminal or
terrorist along the same line as men. Traditionally, women have been presented as peaceful,
submissive or victims in the context of violence, terrorism, and war. Therefore, women’s
violence in terrorism takes place outside of these stereotypical understandings of womanhood.
Their violent behavior is generally seen as a flaw in their femininity, as well as their
humanity. This often leads to a characterization of these women which denies both agency and autonomy (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p. 1-11). Violent behavior in women is often explained by male influence, a man either persuaded or forced her to act (Bloom, 2011a, p. ix). These ideal-typical gender roles have been prominent in the description of female migrants to the Islamic State as well.

More recently, the focus has shifted as the Islamic State has faced enormous setbacks during the last two years, losing both territory and power throughout Syria and Iraq. These setbacks have implications not only for the Islamic State itself but also for the individual members of the organization. The changes have resulted in a decrease in the number of individuals traveling to the conflict zones, and for most European countries the numbers have come to a halt. The setbacks have also led many IS-members to leave the so-called caliphate, causing an exodus where approximately 5600 from all over the world have returned to their home countries (McCarthy, 2017). Over the last couple of years, many European citizens have returned, and are facing prosecution and long prison sentences. There has been an increase in the number of arrests for returning foreign fighters in the last couple of years, according to Europol, with 718 arrests in European countries in 2016, compared to 687 in 2015, and 395 in 2014. (TESAT, 2017, p. 7). However, the clear majority of the returnees are male, and the ICSVE have found that men return in a higher rate than women with a ratio of four to one (2017, p. 10).

1.2 Research Questions
This study addresses a topic that is often overlooked or undermined in political science and international relations – female participation in terrorism. Women are typically portrayed as victims, passive participators or coerced individuals in terrorist organizations, rather than active participants with agency. This portrait of women preserve gender assumptions about women in terrorism and further hinders counter-terrorism policies by devaluing their participation. This study explores the relatively new phenomenon of young, Western, Muslim women and girls traveling to Iraq and Syria to join the Islamic State, focusing on the Norwegian women. The main objectives of this research are to explore the women’s radicalization process and their motivations for leaving. Moreover, this thesis aims at identifying why the Islamic State is appealing to Muslim women, and to discuss the various questions surrounding their return to Norway.
This master thesis addresses these three research questions:

1. Why were these women, who were seemingly well-integrated into the Norwegian society, radicalized to the degree that they chose to join the Islamic State?

2. What does the so-called caliphate offer Muslim women in comparison to that of the secular emancipation of women?

3. How can we understand the Norwegian women’s motivations for joining the Islamic State, and for not returning?

1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter two presents the literature review for this thesis, outlining the ongoing academic discourse on female participation in the Islamic State to anchor the research questions in the already established research on the topic. The third chapter presents the theoretical framework guiding this thesis, focusing on radicalization theory and social constructivism to further our understanding of female participation in IS. Chapter four outlines the methodological framework for this thesis, discussing the research design, data collection, selection of respondents, as well as the challenges, limitations and ethical considerations. Chapter five presents the findings and consists of three sub-chapters corresponding to the research questions presented above. The analysis of the findings is also incorporated into this chapter. Finally, the last chapter summarizes the results of this thesis and assesses how the research question is answered and provide suggestions on the way forward.
2 Literature Review

This chapter seeks to establish literature review to provide insight into the phenomenon of female participation in terrorism in general, and in the Islamic State in particular, as well as anchoring the research questions in the already scholarly literature on the topic. By drawing on a variety of established research, this chapter aims to outline the ongoing academic discussion on the topic, mapping out its contributions and limitations. The chapter begins by outlining the ongoing debate on female jihad, presenting the dominant narratives for understanding women’s violence, before turning the attention to what has been written on women’s motivations for joining the Islamic State and the roles they inhabit once inside the so-called caliphate. In a subsequent part of the chapter, the Norwegian contingent of this phenomenon is presented, outlining what has been written about radicalized men and women in Norway, and on the individuals which have traveled to the IS-controlled areas, in terms of motivations, radicalization and recruitment.

2.1 The Debate on Female Jihad

Looking back just a few years, most writings on jihadi terrorism and foreign fighters assumed participants to be male. Indeed, most references to women in these texts portrayed females as voiceless victims of war, rather than active volunteers to jihad. While the incorporation of women into the Islamic State has brought about a new wave of scholarly literature on female jihad, women joining terrorist organizations is by no means a new phenomenon, nor a uniquely Islamic one. Bloom gives a detailed account of women’s involvement in terrorist groups as far back as the 1960s, with examples such as the “black widow bombers” of the Chechen war, female members of the Palestinian resistance group Fatah and women supporting the LTTE in Sri Lanka (2011a). During the last three decades, women have participated more actively within terrorist organizations, especially as suicide bombers, accounting for almost 25% of all suicide attacks between 1985 and 2010 (Bloom, 2011b, p. 2). Women participating in what can be defined as jihad (struggle) goes back to the time of the Prophet, but the information on the way they participated in is limited. Mubarak compiled the names of 67 women who ‘fought’ during the time of the Prophet but finds that few of them actively took part in fighting, instead, their roles were more of a supporting one, assisting male fighters in terms of encouragement or medical care (Cook, 2005, p. 376). This historical argument has been used by Muslim women today in defending their choice to engage in jihad. But the underlying assumption has always been that she could not have made
this decision by herself and that a man persuaded her into acting (Sjoberg, 2018, p. 296). The women making hijrah to the Islamic State differs quite drastically from these other examples, as these women come from all over the world to join a terrorist organization in a different country, making them participants of a global conflict.

Why approach this subject from the angle of gender and gender-differentiated analysis? As Sjoberg and Gentry point out (2011, p. 2), violent women are violent people, and like all people, they live in a gendered world. By studying the phenomenon of female jihad through the prism of gender, we have a better chance of understanding how they develop in a social world that is different for men and women. The aim of this study is not to use gender as the dominant approach for analysis, but instead, contribute to a refined examination of individual processes and recognize the range of gendered dynamics at play in this phenomenon. The gendered dimension of the process of radicalization leading to violence has still received relatively little attention. Pearson and Winterbotham write that “Studies of female and male radicalization have often considered them in isolation from one another. Women have often been considered on the margins” (2017, p. 62). Thus, the literature on radicalized women are often limited to the question of terrorism, direct participation in armed struggle or violent action, without examining the less spectacular types of involvement that women may accept in extremist groups. Research on radicalized women, or on women involved in violent extremist organizations, often try to establish their intrinsic motives and to determine whether they are different from those of men.

Author of several academic works on this question, Mia Bloom summarizes the reasons for women’s violence by what she calls the 4 R’s: revenge, redemption, relationship, and respect. She also adds a fifth: rape. In some morally conservative societies, violent extremist groups take advantage of the rigid concept of ‘honor’ to recruit women. Thus, a woman with a troubled past is offered redemption by becoming a martyr. In a manner of speaking, she will have more value dead than alive (Bloom, 2011b, p. 8). These ideas offer a relatively good explanation of the women’s involvement in violence during war or in areas where violence is a part of daily life. But they do not work as well when it comes to women living in societies that are at peace, particularly when they are democratic and liberal. Moreover, she frames female radicalization in highly personal terms and says little about religious or political reasons behind radicalization. Another idea proposed by Bloom; the fact that some women live in a context where they are relegated to the domestic space, their only contacts being with
family members, they cannot become politically radicalized in the same manner as men. Accordingly, such women would initially join extremist or terrorist groups through entertainment, by following a family member, subsequently progressing to political radicalization and ideological justification after encountering other women in such groups, or after being imprisoned (2011b, p. 10). This idea too offers only a partial explanation of radicalization trajectories in which women are not just followers. On the other hand, Speckhard argues that men and women share most of the motivations that lead them to engage in violent actions. Instead, she argues, that the principal differences are more between women in conflict zones and women in areas at peace. In most cases, women’s involvement in violence or terrorism is not due to coercion, particularly when they live in pacified areas (2008, p. 1002). She writes that:

Women do not bomb themselves primarily to drive a feminist cause. Instead they act out of motivations inside conflict zones of trauma, revenge, nationalism, expression of community outrage and in non-conflict zones feelings of alienation, marginalization, negative self-identity, and a desire to act on behalf of those inside conflict zones (Speckhard, 2008, p. 995).

Similarly, Jessica Stern finds that there are several risk factors for radicalization including time on the internet, the feeling of marginalization and alienation, and experiences of discrimination. According to her, social injustice is the most common grievance which leads to involvement in violence. She highlights the importance of group dynamics, arguing that “Once individuals are inside a group, group dynamics likely play a role in their decision making” (2016, p. 106). While the Islamic State claims to be changing the world, to build and expand their so-called caliphate, the people who join are often mobilized by more mundane or personal factors, like the chance to be a hero, to remake themselves, or to earn a higher salary. Stern, like Speckhard, argues that men and women share most of the motivations for joining. However, she points out that there is a difference between local recruits and Western recruits to the Islamic State (ibid., p. 105-110). Other reports published by the ISD, dealing with the radicalization of the hundreds of European women who have joined jihadist groups in Syria, illustrate the heterogeneity of their motivations and radicalization paths. The conclusions offered agree with authors like Bloom who emphasize that radicalization trajectories, whether they lead to joining an extremist group or committing suicide attacks, are not necessarily the same from one woman to another (2011b, p. 11). They argue that the motivations and underlying causes of involvement are different for each woman, even if they are influenced
by gender dynamics and gender-differentiated factors (Saltman & Smith, 2015; Hoyle et al., 2015).

According to Khosrokhavar, the main motivation driving female terrorists is the desire to avenge a deceased or imprisoned male family member, often a father, brother or a husband. Furthermore, he writes that women committing terrorist attacks or joining terrorist organizations often does so to prove themselves as equal to men. By dying for a religious cause, women can raise their status from that of subsequent to men. “They hope that if women can equal men in heroism in the face of death, it will become more difficult for men to deny women equality in life. Women’s death as martyrs thus assume an antipatriarchal, even feminist dimension” (2015, p. 46). Making these arguments, Khosrokhavar primarily explains female violence as a result of their relationship with men, but argue that there could be other explanations for radicalization, such as resentment, humiliation, new opportunities within groups, or the desire to become a martyr and elevating one’s status (ibid., p. 48). Olivier Roy takes a different approach to female radicalization when arguing that women are not merely subjected to psychological influence, but that they actively support the cause when joining jihadist groups, and while they can only experience death and religious salvation indirectly, they find a balance inside jihadist groups where their roles as supporters and their activism go hand in hand (2017, p. 26).

These different approaches to female jihad produce two broad arguments. On the one hand, some researchers argue that men and women share the same motivations for joining terrorist organizations, whether those motivations are personal, political, religious or ideological. On the other hand, other researchers suggest that motivations differ between men and women, and suggest that while men are mainly driven by political and religious reasons, women join because of personal or emotional reasons (Jacques & Taylor, 2008). How we perceive and describe these women’s actions and motivations is important for our understanding of the phenomenon, and could likely have implications for security policies and judicial responses.

2.1.1 Dominant Narratives

Examining the established research on female participation in terrorism and war produces two broad narratives for understanding women’s violence. The first is the understanding of women as victims, as the norms associated with women in war and violence are fragile, innocent and harmless, are as old as wars themselves (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2011, p. 4). The
second categorization understands women as active agents, arguing that men and women share the same motivations for participating in violence. These different narratives and what they entail are important because they frame our understanding and perceptions of these women, as well as the social consequences if they should return. Identifying these different narratives allows us to understand female motivations from different perspectives.

The first and oldest understanding is that of women as victims. When women commit acts of violence, they are presented as victims of oppressive structures or ideologies, or as having been coerced or manipulated into violence by the men around them. This narrative is produced by the perceived norms of women being innocent, nonviolent and fragile (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2011, p. 4). Similarly, Wight and Myers write that “When a woman commits acts of violence, her sex is a lens through which all of her actions are seen and understood” (1996, p. xi). Sjoberg and Gentry take this position as a starting point for understanding women’s violence, arguing that violent women are not perceived as common terrorists, soldiers or criminals, but rather apprehended in gendered illustrations which corroborates gendered stereotypes, depicting women as subordinate, and without agency (2007, p. 4-5). If women are understood as active practitioners of violence, the explanation for their behavior is often individualized and their motivations are generally interpreted as personal, rather than political or religious. Sjoberg and Gentry argue that the gendered narratives of women’s violence can be characterized within three categories; mothers, monsters, and whores.

The understanding of women as mothers builds upon the idea that women are inherently peaceful and innocent, and when they act outside of this gendered logic, their actions are explained away by linking their behavior to maternal instincts. Sjoberg and Gentry argue that there are two types of mother narratives which are found throughout history, the first being women as ‘nurturing mothers’. This narrative place women in a more supportive role, where her desire to be needed and feel useful is the driving force behind her engagement in terrorism. Through this narrative, women are perceived as less threatening as their role is that of support, whether that be emotionally or through encouragement. She is essentially what Sjoberg and Gentry describe as a ‘domesticated terrorist’ (2007, p. 33). The other narrative is that of women as ‘vengeful mothers’, where her inability, failure or loss drives her towards violence. This narrative describes women’s actions based on emotions, where her extreme anger, humiliation or incapability pushes her towards revenge (ibid., p. 34-35). Both of these
narratives reinforce the understanding of women as victims, as they are not responsible for their actions because they are driven by maternal instincts.

When women commit acts of violence, they are seen as deviating from their inherent feminine norms and described as mad. The monster narrative is built upon the belief that if a woman is violent, there is something fundamentally wrong with her womanhood, as women are believed to be the givers of life and not the takers of life. This belief dehumanizes the women, describing them as monsters because of their violent actions. As a result of this, violent women are seen as more dangerous than men because of their emotional instability and unpredictability. The monster narrative removes the responsibility of these women, as their actions are explained by their faulty womanhood and mental abnormalities (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p. 36-41). The whore narrative sexualizes women’s violence by explaining their motivations for participation in violence as sexual deviations of some sort (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p. 42). Similar to that of the monster narrative, violent women described as whores indicate that there is something wrong with their womanhood. Women who participate in war, violence, and terrorism is perceived as a threat in a patriarchal world, creating chaos and disorder, and women are therefore made inhuman and innocuous through sexualizing their behavior (ibid., p. 45). This narrative is often used in the media coverage of the women who join the Islamic State, describing these women as jihadi brides, jihadi whores or jihadi sluts performing sexual jihad. These gendered narratives explain female involvement in the Islamic State based on their relationship with men, reducing women who voluntarily join the Islamic State to that of sex objects.

The gendered narratives of mothers, monsters, and whores in explaining female violence reduces women’s agency in the context of violence. More recently, some scholars have criticized these reductionist narratives of women as victims, arguing that women joining terrorist organizations do so because of a multitude of different reasons, not just because of men (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2011; Saltman & Smith, 2015; Loken & Zelenz, 2016; Hoyle et al., 2015; Perešin & Cervone). This understanding emphasizes the similarities in motivations for men and women joining terrorist organizations, such as religious, ideological or political explanations, along with more personal motivations such as the search for identity, belonging and redemption. Saltman & Smith (2015), Loken & Zelenz (2016), Hoyle et al. (2015) and Perešin & Cervone (2015) are amongst the many researchers who have focused especially on women in the Islamic State, find along somewhat similar lines that men and
women share the same motivations for joining the Islamic State, emphasizing ideological and religious commitments as the primary driving factors, while isolation and alienation pushes them away from their home countries (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p. 14-15; Loken & Zelenz, 2016, p. 65). Moreover, Saltman & Smith argue that the assumption that women join to become wives of jihadi fighters is reductionist and wrong. They argue that like the reason of men, women’s reasons are complex and multi-causal, and include different factors, and cannot simply be described as neither wives of IS fighters (2015, p. 69-70).

Furthermore, some research argues that women’s involvement in terrorism represents an anti-patriarchal or feminist aspect. This narrative argues that by choosing to participate in a violent organization, women are reacting to something they believe to be fundamentally wrong in their societies, often in relation to their womanhood. Hegghammer argue that the increasing number of female travelers to the Islamic State, compared to other contexts, can be explained by a change of norms in Islamist communities, “a kind of Islamic women’s liberation” (2014, p. 281, my translation), but offer little explanation as to how these norms have changed. Another explanation within this narrative portrays female participating in the Islamic State as a sort of alternative feminism for Muslim women who struggle to find their place within the Western ideas of women’s emancipation. Zakaria writes that “The act of joining ISIL can be seen as a militant rebellion against the enduring Western construction of the Muslim woman as the lesser feminist” (2016). Lastly, Lia and Nesser contend that women joining the IS represents a rebellion from the patriarchal family structures at home, and by leaving their home they also leave the traditional family authority (2014, p. 411). These notions all argue that Muslim women participating in violent groups, such as IS, can be explained by a sort of Islamic feminist development, where women participate as active agents. However, little explanation is offered as to how these normative changes have come about.

These different narratives frame how we perceive the women joining the Islamic State, and how we understand their actions and motivations. These understandings depend in large parts on whether we perceive their involvement with the violent terrorist groups as a result of their own individual judgment or as the result of coercion or force. Therefore, this thesis uses the concept muhajirat (migrants) in describing a female individual traveling to join the Islamic State, to avoid controversial or gendered narratives such as ‘foreign fighter’, ‘female terrorist’ or ‘jihadi bride’. “The term muhajirah was coined by the first historians of Islam to honour the women who protected the Prophet during the early Islamic battles in the 7th century, both
female members of the Prophet’s family and new converts to Islam” (Perešin, 2015, p. 23). This terminology is used because once in IS territory, the women are not known to participate in active combat because of the strict Shariah rulings and cannot be defined as foreign fighters. Moreover, the diverse range of motivations for travel exceeds the reductionist role of ‘wife’ or ‘bride’ to fighters (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p. 7).

2.1.2 Motivations for Leaving

Although the phenomenon of foreign fighters is not a new one, a common framework for understanding this phenomenon has yet to be developed (Malet, 2010, p. 112). Research on foreign fighters in general, and female migrants to the Islamic State in particular offers a variety of explanations for participation in conflicts abroad, but often struggle to capture the complex and multi-faceted nature of the phenomenon. In order to fully understand why women leave their home countries and travel to a conflict-affected zone, and to be able to answer the question of why so few returns, it is essential to delineate their justifications for performing hijrah. Recognizing that motivations are multi-layered, complex and inspired by a number of factors is important. Identifying motives for migration can help explain why young women choose to undertake high-risk political behaviors, such as joining the Islamic State. Moreover, Loken & Zelenz argue that it is necessary to understand that these women are responding to their political, social and religious surroundings, making a choice that they believe will benefit their interest the most (2017, p. 67). Because the objective of this thesis is to understand the motivations for joining the Islamic State and for staying there, this section seeks to highlight the various explanations on general motivations to form the main body of information. As little is known about the Norwegian women inside the so-called caliphate, this section is largely based on established research on Western female migrants, drawing primarily from the ISD’s extensive database, as well as other literature on the topic.

A report by the ISD categorize women who travel to the territories controlled by the Islamic State into two different groups: those who travel with a male companion, and those who travel alone or with other women. Within the second group, the motivations and reasons for travel are identified within three broad categories; grievances, solutions and personal motivations (Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 10). In another report, the ISD identifies a range of different motivations for female participation in the Islamic State. Their data are derived from a database on Western female muhajirat, and focus on how these women themselves have expressed their motivations and reasons for leaving and joining the Islamic State. The report
differentiates between push and pull factors, where push factors can be described as grievances or reasons which pushes individuals away from their home country, and pull factors are narratives which offer solutions to the negative push factors (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p. 8).

The first push factor revolves around the feeling of isolation and discontent with Western culture and society. Growing up, most teens and young adults experience a period of identity building. For Muslims, this transcendence from adolescence into adulthood can be even more difficult, as they struggle to balance their religious identity with their Western lifestyle (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p. 9). This process of identity building can help explain why many female migrants to the Islamic State are so young. Being a second or third generation immigrant, this balancing act may become even more complicated, as they feel distanced from the countries and culture of their parents, as well feeling isolated or socially secluded from Western societies, experiencing a “double sense of non-belonging” (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 800). Being an ethnic or religious minority can also entail experiencing discrimination, harassment or racism. Female Muslims are often more exposed to discrimination, especially if they wear traditional Islamic clothing such as hijab, jilbab or niqab (Van Leuven et al., 2016, p. 103). The feeling of non-belonging can also be intensified by the way Islam and Muslims are portrayed in the media (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p. 10).

While the feeling of isolation is not enough to explain why individuals become radicalized, it is essential in understanding why Muslim youth and young adults feel distanced from their communities, and search for other alternatives, therefore being more vulnerable to radicalization and extremist beliefs (ibid.).

Secondly, the feeling that the Ummah is under attack further intensifies the discontent toward the West. This feeling is based on the various conflicts and wars that have affected the transnational Muslim community over the last years, especially under the banner of the war on terrorism. However, Roy argues that “The Muslim community that they are eager to avenge is almost never specified (“all over the world”). It is a non-historical and non-spatial reality” (2017, p. 45). Similarly, Malet writes that “The group identity that enables recruiters to frame the distant war as self-defense is constructed; the message of self-defense remains constant” (2013, p. 5). By creating a narrative that the Ummah is under attack by the West, the Islamic State frames the situation in a binary discourse, creating a sharp distinction between themselves and the perceived hostile West. Through these discourses, the so-called
The first pull factors revolve around the individual religious duty (Fard al-Ayn) of migrating. With the proclamation of an Islamic caliphate in 2014 and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the caliph, the Islamic State went from being an organization to presenting itself as a state. This development made it incumbent on both men and women to join, to help build the so-called caliphate and help protect and defend it against its enemies (Awan, 2015, p. 50). The religious ideology serves as a motivation for joining, as it presents participation as the only alternative (Loken & Zelenz, 2017, p. 53). Presenting itself as a state-building project, IS allowed more room for women to participate, holding instrumental roles within the so-called caliphate as wives, mothers, doctors, nurses and teachers (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p. 14).

Tied closely with the push factor of feeling isolated and identity building, the second pull factor discloses the concept of belonging and sisterhood. The feeling of “otherness” in their home countries leaves many Muslim women searching for belonging and friendship somewhere else. Online, the sisterhood within the Islamic State is portrayed as a loving
community based on Islam, strong enough to replace the women’s families back home. One woman within the Islamic State writes;

The family you get in exchange for leaving the ones behind are like the pearl in comparison to the Shell you threw away into the foam of the sea which is the Ummah. The reason for this is because your love for one another is purely for the sake of Allah - Umm Layth, 2014 (Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 24)

Saltman & Smith describes belonging and sisterhood as the main factor driving women towards the Islamic State. However, they also find that females within the organization usually socialize with other women based on language and nationality, as many struggles to learn the Arabic language (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p. 16; Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 24).

Lastly, the romanticization of life within the Islamic State serves as an important pull factor for many women contemplating leaving their home countries and families behind. Leaving their home and traveling to a foreign country awakens a sense of adventure for young women. The feeling of being part of something bigger and helping other Muslims can serve as a motivation for Muslim women who felt no sense of belonging and meaning in their home countries. The feeling of participation parred with the wish to fill important roles within the so-called caliphate create a sense of empowerment for these women. In addition to adventure, finding romance within the Islamic State has also been described as an important motivation (Saltman & Smith, 2015; Hoyle et al., 2015). Marrying a man who fights for the Islamic State leaves the women with a sense of privilege and importance. Furthermore, marriage increase the feeling of transitioning into adulthood, giving the women a sense of independence and agency in choosing their own husband, as the family often plays an important part in choosing a spouse in Muslim communities. Becoming the widow of a martyr is seen as a privilege, raising their status within the community in the Islamic State (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p. 16). The status of a martyr’s widow also entails a stable allowance each month. Financial security is viewed as another important motivation for living within the so-called caliphate, by providing their members with a home and an income, the Islamic State creates a sense of economic stability which might have been lacking in their life back home (Loken & Zelenz, 2017, p. 59).

2.1.3 Roles Inside the Caliphate

As mentioned, the Islamic State adheres to strict Shariah rulings, preventing women from partaking in active combat. The roles of women inside the so-called caliphate are therefore
assumed to be largely restricted to the private sphere, as wives of jihadi fighters and mothers of future jihadists. Their daily lives are dedicated to household tasks such as cleaning, cooking and raising their children as well as studying religion and Arabic (Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 22-23). Marriage is highly encouraged, as women without a husband are restricted in movement and opportunities. Single women arriving in the IS-controlled areas live in something described as a ‘women-only hostel’ and are expected to marry soon after their arrival (Saltman, 2016, p. 187).

Some women, however, move outside of this domestic supportive role according to the Quilliam Foundation. The women who are part of the Al-Khanssaa brigade, an all-female police force, patrol the streets making sure women adhere to the strict Shariah rulings of the Islamic State (Winter, 2015). Women also hold important roles within the Islamic State as disseminators of propaganda online, actively recruiting and calling upon other Muslims to come to join the Islamic State form their private social media accounts (Saltman, 2016, p. 175). Common for several female migrants on social media is their desire to fight alongside their male counterparts, and participating in jihad may have served as a motivation for these women when making the decision to join the Islamic State. Neumann finds that women who promote jihad and disseminates propaganda online often are more aggressive than men in their statements, most likely as a response to the frustration that they are not allowed to participate in the fighting (2016, p. 121-122). However, Hoyle et al. find that the same women who describe a desire to join the fight also emphasizes their roles as a home-maker, highlighting the importance of being a righteous wife to their jihadi husbands and raising the next generation of jihadist fighters (2015, p. 31).

The media wing of the Al-Khanssaa brigade also published an un-official manifesto in Arabic, discussing at length the problems of Western civilization and feminism, and how life inside the Islamic State is better for Muslim women compared to that of the West. Making suggestions for how women should be educated, clothed, working, and taking care of the household, the Al-Khanssaa brigade gives an insight into the reality of women in IS (Winter, 2015). The manifesto reinforces the notion that the woman’s role is primarily a domestic one, as a homemaker and in raising righteous children. They suggest, however, that it is permissible to leave the house under certain circumstances, such as for studying religion, working, or if it becomes obligatory for women to engage in jihad (ibid., p. 8). Education for women should focus mostly on *fiqh*, religion, Arabic, and science, but is restricted to the age
between seven and fifteen years old (ibid., p. 24). It is however mandatory to seek education because women are unable to fulfill their roles if they are “illiterate or ignorant” according to the authors (ibid., p. 7-18). Working outside the home is considered a secondary function of a woman, and only certain occupations are allowed. Working as a doctor, nurse or teacher is recognized as suitable jobs for women. Lastly, as discussed above, women are prohibited from partaking in active combat unless jihad is appointed and made obligatory for women by imams. Jihad can be appointed obligatory for women if men are unable to fight (ibid., p. 22).

2.2 The Norwegian Context
According to the Norwegian Security Service, ten Norwegian women have left to join the Islamic State since 2013. It is believed that all women have married inside the so-called caliphate and given birth to approximately 20 children in total (TV2, 2018a). Apart from one woman who is in a refugee camp in Syria, all women are believed to still be residing in IS-controlled areas. While at least two of them left with a male companion, most of the women traveled out of Norway on their own, or with other women (TV2, 2014; TV2, 2018a; VG2015a; VG, 2015b). Despite being a heterogeneous group with different backgrounds, motivations, and purposes, these women are still described – by academia and government alike – as a homogeneous group which presents a large security threat to the Norwegian society if they should return (Andersson, Høgestøl & Lie, 2017, p. 10). Because of the diversity of these women, it is impossible to create a comprehensive profile of the Norwegian muhajirat. The group of women consists of individuals with vastly different backgrounds, the majority being second or third generation immigrants from countries such as Pakistan, Morocco, and Somalia, but also ethnic Norwegian converts to Islam. The women were relatively young when they left. Most were in their mid-20s, the youngest was 16, and the oldest was 29. While there is no doubt that the data on these women are scarce, some scholarly literature has focused on radicalized individuals in Norway, and on the men and women who have joined the Islamic State.

Felles Kontraterrorsenter (FKTS) contends that the Norwegian men and women who left to join the Islamic State share certain commonalities. They are described as relatively young, where a majority are unemployed or have loose ties to working life, often with a background of ties to criminal communities (2014, p. 3). The majority of them seem to come from the same areas, and many knew each other prior to leaving (Lia & Nesser, 2014, p. 409). A report
produced by the Norwegian Security Service argue that those that become radicalized often are in vulnerable socioeconomic positions (2016, p. 7). Moreover, the report also finds rational adaptation problems and drug abuse to be common problems amongst radicalized individuals in Norway. It also sites that psychological and mental health issues may be more prominent amongst these individuals than the general public, but lack empirical data for this presumption (ibid., p. 8). It is worth mentioning, however, that PST’s report is not exclusively built on the individuals who have traveled and joined the Islamic State, but on radicalized individuals in Norway which have been in the police’s searchlight. Hegghammer finds that established Islamist networks, such as Profetens Ummah (PU), are important in the recruitment process, but that these individuals seem to be traveling out of their own free will, and are most likely not coerced or manipulated into joining the Islamic State (2014, p. 282).

2.2.1 Motivation, Radicalization and Recruitment

Hegghammer writes that it is extremely difficult to answer the question of why people join the Islamic State because there are vastly different reasons and motivations, and because not all motivations are declared (2014, p. 281). Similar to Hegghammer, the PST, FKTS, Lia, and Nesser all argue that the motivations for traveling are complex and multi-faceted and that there are large individual variations (FKTS, 2014, p. 4; Lia & Nesser, 2014, p. 400).

However, there are a few motivations that seem to be recurring in the explanations for why people choose to join the terrorist organization. Lia and Nesser emphasize social problems and the feeling of exclusion, as important reasons for why men and women do not feel a sense of belonging in the Norwegian society and begin looking for other alternatives (2014, p. 409). Associating oneself with extreme Islamist organizations, such as the Islamic State, can, therefore, be understood as a revolt against the Norwegian society, which they experience as exclusionary (FKTS, 2014, p. 4). FKTS contends that the strong and disturbing pictures and videos from the Syrian conflict created a desire to help, motivate both men and women into traveling to the area to help the Ummah (ibid.). Moreover, adventure, excitement, experience, and recognition are also common explanations for why people join the Islamic State (2014, p. 4). According to Hegghammer, the reasons for leaving can be categorized into religious and political motivations. While many emphasize the religious aspect of joining, such as individual duty (Fard al-Ayn), others focus on the political element, where humanitarianism and the responsibility to protect the Syrian population from the brutal abuse of the Assad-regime is prominent (2014, p. 282). Lia & Nesser, on the other hand, write that some of those who traveled could be categorized as ‘not particularly religious’ (2014, p. 410).
According to the FKTS, the Norwegians who joined the Islamic State were located on different stages of a radicalization process, where some were in the beginning-phases of such a process, whilst others had been radicalized for a long period of time (2014, p 4). Hegghammer writes that established Islamist networks, such as Profetens Ummah (PU), has played an important part in facilitating the journey for both the men and women who traveled (2014, p. 282). Furthermore, the recruitment process seems to vary from person to person. Whilst some may have been convinced to travel by important figures in the Islamist network in Norway or by people who have already made the journey, others have been inspired by propaganda or social media postings of the atrocities in Syria by other members of the Islamic State, and may have made the decision on their own (ibid.). When it comes to the travel itself, Hegghammer states that most of the people who left traveled in groups of two, three or more, and that the journey often goes via Turkey. The importance of camaraderie, brotherhood, and sisterhood is also highlighted in the literature, as both a motivation for traveling and as an important driving force for recruitment (ibid.).

While the literature presented in this part of the chapter offers useful insight into the various questions surrounding female jihad, two aspects are largely missing from the debate. Previous studies have produced valuable frameworks illustrating the process of radicalization, but most are male-centric and empirical accounts of female radicalization processes are largely absent in the debate. In the Norwegian context, little is written about the female contingent of the phenomenon, and how motivation, radicalization, and return might differ to that of their male companions. Moreover, even though much has been written on the motivations for leaving, such as the push and pull factors presented by Saltman & Smith (2015), and the grievances, solutions and personal motivations suggested by Hoyle et al. (2015), minimal research has focused on the motivations for staying in IS after its setbacks, and why women return at a lower rate than men. This research aims to fill some part of the knowledge gap related to the motivations and radicalization of Norwegian female members of the Islamic State.
3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework for this thesis and aims at presenting a holistic understanding of the theoretical approaches relevant to the research topic. To theorize and conceptualize the topic of this thesis, this chapter draws from an extensive body of literature on radicalization theory and social constructivism. These different academic fields offer different theoretical foundations and concepts for how we understand the phenomenon of women in the Islamic State. This chapter proceeds in two parts. The first section aims at presenting a brief overview of radicalization theory by outlining different definitions, theoretical approaches, and models of radicalization. The second part of this chapter goes more in depth, applying a social constructivist approach to radicalization through framing theory, outlining Quintan Wiktorowicz’s Al-Muhajiroun model, which will serve as the main analytical tool for this thesis.

3.1 Radicalization

Although there exists consensus among scholars and governments that radicalization is an important element in explaining why individuals join terrorist organizations, the definition of radicalization, as well as other concepts such as terrorism or extremism, is not agreed upon (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2011, p. 418). This sometimes leads to a conflation, confusing the understanding and interpretation of radicalization. Taking these misunderstandings and different interpretations into account, this thesis adopts the concept of Radicalization into Violent Extremism (RVE), theorized by Borum (2011). Radicalization into Violent Extremism refers to the dynamic process of adopting violent beliefs, as well as the movement from thinking to acting upon these beliefs (ibid., p. 8). Borum further defines radicalization as a pathway rather than an event, and that while radicalization often can be facilitated through others, not everyone who radicalizes is recruited (ibid., p. 13-14). This process is best understood as a personal and political change, where an individual’s beliefs are gradually altered. Moreover, while radicalization is understood as a process rather than a single occurrence, the process may be accelerated by a crisis which produces a ‘catalyst event’ (Christmann, 2012, p. 10). The concept of radicalization, although it can be applied to a variety of different settings, is used in this thesis in the context of extreme religious beliefs, reflecting the Salafist-Jihadi ideology of the Islamic State.

It is worth mentioning, however, that there exists some debate around the causality between radicalization and terrorism. While most scholars and governments agree that radicalization is
an important element in explaining participation in terrorism, the tendency to explicitly understand terrorism as a result of radicalization is problematic for several apparent reasons. Firstly, as mentioned, both radicalization and terrorism are contested concepts and can entail different things in different contexts, which causes confusion. Secondly, only a small number of individuals holding radical beliefs become involved in terrorism. Borum, therefore, argues that we to differentiate between ‘radicalization’ and ‘action pathways’, where radicalization is defined “as the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs” and action pathways are understood as the “process of engaging in terrorism or violent extremist actions” (Borum, 2011, p. 9). Lastly, not all perpetrators of terrorist acts are motivated by radical beliefs (Horgan, 2012; Schuurman & Taylor, 2018, p. 3).

3.1.1 Theoretical Approaches

Monaghan and Molnar provide a systematic review of the various theoretical approaches to radicalization, drawing on different scholars, models, and theories. They summarize the main theoretical approaches which aim to explain radicalization and violent extremism as cognitive theories, the “behavioral approach” and the “narrative school” (2016, p. 395-397). The cognitive theories aim to find the root causes of terrorism and define radicalization as “a cultural-psychological predisposition” (2016, p. 396). Theories within this approach present identity crisis as a starting point for adopting extremist beliefs which eventually leads to radicalization. The foundation of the cognitive theories stems from the attempt to explain Muslim challenges of integration in Europe and argue that “anti-Western attitudes, religious fundamentalism and youth alienation” are important cognitive indicators driving individuals towards radicalization (ibid.). Christmann contends that Muslim identity formation for young individuals living in the West is of importance, as they often struggle to find a balance between their faith and the secular society that they live in. The adaptation of a more radical identity may stem from what Christmann calls an ‘identity crisis’ or ‘identity confusion’, and can be intensified by discrimination, lack of social mobility and confidence, which leaves individuals vulnerable for accepting a fundamentalist interpretation of religion (2012, p. 24). Furthermore, cognitive theories aim at identifying personal characteristics in an attempt to establish a ‘terrorist personality profile’, and center around center around pathological explanations for radicalization, such as mental illness or repressed sexuality (Monaghan and Molnar, 2016, p. 396). Christmann argues, however, that most Western terrorists “appear notable for their normality and ordinariness” (2012, p. 23), and claims that this approach has
been unsuccessful in explaining radicalization, and while it cannot be ruled out completely, it has yet to define the individual-level characteristics of a ‘terrorist personality’ (ibid., p. 24).

The second group of theories in Monaghan and Molar’s article focuses on interaction and social networks in explaining radicalization. The “behavioral approach” explores how online and offline communication and networks construct “action pathways” of radicalization into violent extremism (2016, p. 396). Christmann finds that radicalization is a “group phenomenon, with social relationships and networks playing a key role in pathways to participation” (2012, p. 27). Radicalization, therefore, is about whom you know, and individuals adopt radical ideas and beliefs through socializing, indoctrination and peer pressure in smaller groups (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 801). Socializing in small communities or larger networks creates a common sense of identity, understanding, and priorities. The conceptualization of oneself as part of a discriminated and oppressed collectivity leads to a discontent which drives individuals towards violence (Borum, 2011, p. 17). Theories within this approach “direct their attention towards locating indicators within interpersonal dynamics and tracing potential transformations in personal habits, behaviours, religious beliefs political associations and expressions, that are indicative of pathways towards radicalization” (Monaghan and Molar, 2016, p. 396). Christmann argues that the process of radicalization can occur in small friend groups, larger networks, or as a result of top-down recruitment by established radical organizations (2012, p. 27). Similar for these theoretical approaches of radicalization is the emphasis on group dynamics, and how identity, beliefs, and ideas are shaped through interaction (ibid.).

The third group of theories takes a more holistic approach when explaining radicalization. The “narrative school”, like the cognitive and behavioral approaches, seek to find indicators which pushes people towards radicalization but include more than physiological, biological, religious and socialization variables. The “narrative school” seeks to avoid reductionist explanations for radicalization, by including societal and political variables, and study the interplay between the different variables (Monaghan and Molar, 2016, p. 397). “The point of narrative accounts of radicalisation is to support previous cognitive and behavioural approaches with sustained focus on the (predominantly religious) social movements and cultures that inform radicalization” (ibid., p. 396). Similarly, Christmann argues that contexts such as immigration, integration, discrimination, segregation, and deprivation are important for understanding radicalization (2012, p. 24). Within this theoretical approach, we find
French sociology, which analyzes conditions such as marginalization, education, social environment and degree of social pressure when looking at why individuals become radicalized, and argue that there exists no single reason for radicalization, but rather that radicalization processes take place in the recreation of identity which is missing in a world that seems hostile and challenging (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 799). The recent terrorist attacks in France has caused a rift between the French sociologists Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy regarding jihadist terrorism, and more specifically the role religion plays in radicalization. The scholars produce two different interpretations of the phenomenon, where Kepel finds the explanation in ideology and religion, where the reactionary interpretation of Salafism can lead to radicalization, while Roy argues that the phenomenon can be explained by a generational revolt and nihilism, where young people not only reject the culture of Western societies, but the religion of their parents as well (Szylikiewicz, 2016). The two positions, radicalization of Islam (Kepel) and the “Islamicization” of radicalism (Roy), offers different explanations for where the problem lies when it comes to the jihadist movement.

Ted Robert Gurr propose relative deprivation as an explanation for radicalization and defines RD as: “the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the ‘ought’ and the ‘is’ of collective value satisfaction, and this disposes men to violence’ (1971, p. 23). He argues that it is the inconsistencies between what they have, their expectations and what they actually acquire which causes frustration, and could lead to political violence. The many different theories within the narrative approach often uses case study analyzes to capture the circumstantial differences in radicalization (Monaghan and Molar, 2016, p. 397). Theories under the narrative school were the most common in the literature for explaining the various factors that drive individuals towards radicalization and is what will be utilized in the analysis of this thesis because of its holistic approach to explaining radicalization.

### 3.1.2 Radicalization as a Process

Radicalization, as discussed above, is often defined as a process where a personal or political change gradually alter the individual’s belief system and worldview (Christmann, 2012, p. 10). However, some scholars such as Hafez and Mullins argue that radicalization cannot be understood as a process, as they found that it does not involve any linear development containing different stages or phases, and instead describes the phenomenon as a puzzle (2015, p. 970). Crossett and Spitaletta argue that 16 different theories have aimed to identify the causes and origins of radicalization (in Borum, 2011, p. 16). The different theoretical approaches produce various models for explaining and understanding the radicalization
process. By identifying distinct and detectable stages, some scholars argue that we can construct models which define the radicalization process from beginning to end. Outlining every model or pathway to radicalization is beyond the scope of this thesis, instead, it aims to identify similarities between the models. Even though these different models present different stages towards radicalization, we find a few commonalities. An individual change, often in the form of a cognitive opening or identity crisis, seems to be a commonality in the different models, often indicating the beginning stages of a radicalization process. This individual change often results in a search for religion in recreating an identity that seems missing in an antagonistic and complex world. Secondly, this identity formation is usually affected by and intensified through external social factors, such as discrimination, prejudice towards Muslims and relative deprivation. These grievances then result in a dissatisfaction toward the West, which is perceived as the enemy, pushing individuals towards more radical interpretations of religion. Common for most theories and models on radicalization is the vague concept of non-belonging, isolation, exclusion or alienation. The UNDP writes that:

Alienation can emerge from a persistent pattern of exclusion, humiliation, selective mistreatment, and prejudice towards particular groups or individuals by a community, the state and its institutions, or the wider society. Unequal access - or recourse to - essential services and the rule of law by particular minorities or groups could also be a critical factor. Alienation may emerge from perceptions of gross inadequacy at the individual or group level resulting from the inability to deal with widespread or sudden social or demographic change. In this first phase, relations between a particular individual or group and the wider structures of family, society and the state become characterized by withdrawal, anomie, grievances and decreasing political or economic participation (2016, p. 24).

There is no doubt that this definition is nebulous and can denote different things for different people. Taking these different concepts and understandings into account, it is important to recognize where these feelings of alienation come from and how they develop. Another commonality between the different models is that through socialization and mobilization, whether online or in person, anti-Western attitudes and the binary discourse of ‘Us versus Them’ is intensified, resulting in increased socialization, which eventually leads to indoctrination and violent responses. Some models argue that these stages toward radicalization must occur in order, whilst others do not. Moreover, few models say anything about the time frame of radicalization, but as discussed above, it is a process which does not happen overnight and can take place within anything from a few months to several years (Christmann, 2012; Daalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Monaghan & Molnar, 2016).
3.2 Social Movement Theory and Framing Theory

Social Movement Theory (SMT) is a radicalization theory within the narrative approach, which centers around the idea that “violent radicalization is about who you know”, and that reality, ideas, and identity is shaped through social interaction (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 801). SMT argues that violent radicalization is a product of the realization that the individual’s cause will not create political change. Both the state and the movement create frames which clash, resulting in a common sense of discontent which leads to violent radicalization. Moreover, social movement theory emphasizes the role of social networks and group dynamics in explaining radicalization, as socializing in small communities creates a common sense of identity, understanding, and priorities, gradually altering individual’s worldviews (Borum, 2011, p. 17; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 801). The conceptualization of oneself as part of a discriminated and oppressed collectivity creates a discontent which drives individuals towards violence. The UN’s Office of Counter-Terrorism states that “a decision to go to Syria is almost invariably linked to social networks formed in gathering places such as mosques, prisons, schools, universities, neighborhoods or the workplace” (2017, p. 4). McCauley and Moskalenko argue that SMT “is not a single integrated theory but a congeries of ideas that have been found useful in understanding movements for liberal causes such as civil rights and feminism” (2017, p. 206).

A sub-branch of SMT, known as framing theory, takes a more dynamic approach when explaining radicalization. Dalgaard-Nielsen writes that framing theory:

(...) would seek to explain violent radicalization and terrorism through the distinct constructed reality, into which members of violent groups are socialized – a constructed reality or worldview, which frames problems as not just misfortunes, but injustices, attributes responsibility for these injustices, and constructs an argument for the efficacy and/or moral justification of using violence against civilians to right the perceived wrongs (2010, p. 802).

Framing theory therefore takes a social constructivist approach to understanding radicalization when focusing on the construction and distribution of meaning through frames, and how a collective identity is shaped through interaction (ibid., 801). It emphasizes the power of socialization, group dynamics, and group pressure, and argue that it is the demonstrative and intersubjective methods of framing an issue that is important, rather than the issue itself (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 802). A frame in this context can be understood as an individual’s beliefs about life made up of values, ideas and beliefs. If we use the example of banning religious symbols in public schools as an illustration, it is not the forbiddance of
religious symbols that amounts to a problem, but rather the framing of the problem (secularism versus discrimination and freedom of religion). By studying radicalization through a social constructivist lens, framing theory thus identifies that individuals can help construct, recreate or change structures to maximize their interest under a set of constraints, and therefore make a rational choice.

Framing theory and social constructivism is of importance to this study as it allows us to understand how individuals construct reality and identity based on knowledge, experiences, and self-reflection, and how they perceive their role in this constructed reality. This theoretical approach can therefore help answer why the women in this case study became radicalized, as well as their motivations for joining the Islamic State. Moreover, framing theory allows us to understand the how’s and why’s of radicalization and motivations in more depth by presenting a rational choice theory without ignoring the religious, social and ideological aspects. It can also help to understand not only how governments, academia, and the media ascribe meaning to these women, but also how these women make choices based off their understanding of the world around them and of themselves.

3.2.1 Wiktorowicz’s Al-Muhajiroun Model
Quintan Wiktorowicz, a prominent academic scholar studying Islam and radicalization, works within the framing theory approach (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 801). His research on the Muslim, Salafist-Jihadi activist group, Al-Muhajiroun in the UK provides a detailed model of how individuals become radicalized. The four phases of this process are a cognitive opening, religious seeking, frame alignment and socialization (Wiktorowicz, 2004b, p. 1). The model, also known as the Al-Muhajiroun model, will serve as the main analytical tool for this thesis, because it focuses specifically on Salafi-Jihadism in a European context and argue that involvement in terrorism and rational choice is not necessarily incompatible, which is what this case study found.

Joining the Islamic State, or any radical Islamist movement seems illogical and senseless due to the immense risks that participation brings about (Wiktorowicz, 2004b, p. 1). So why do people still become radicalized to the degree that they are willing to resort to violence? Wiktorowicz argues that a person does not become radicalized overnight, instead, they go through different stages where different ideas and understandings of the world are presented through socialization (2004b, p. 1). Framing theory puts emphasis on the process towards
radicalization, arguing that it is not discontent that leads directly to a violent response. Wiktorowicz argues that there must be some sort of social psychological conditions at the individual level in order for violent radicalization to take place and presents this as a prerequisite. According to the Al-Mujahiroun model, the radicalization process starts with a personal problem or crisis forms a cognitive opening, which makes the individual question earlier assumptions and beliefs, making him or her more receptive to new ideas and worldviews. The crisis experienced varies from individual to individual, but examining the scholarly literature on radicalization, Wiktorowicz finds three common types of crises. These types of crises can be categorized as “economic (losing a job, blocked mobility), social/cultural (sense of cultural weakness, racism, humiliation), and political (repression, torture, political discrimination)” (2004b, p. 8). He adds a fourth categorization, personal crisis, “since cognitive openings can be produced by idiosyncratic experiences, such as death in the family, victimization by crime, and family feuds” (ibid.). Furthermore, cognitive openings can also be produced by the organization or movement itself, by actively reaching out to individuals, although this is less common.

Secondly, this cognitive opening initiate a search for answers to overcome the problem. If the person identifies with a specific religion, the cognitive opening can lead to a religious search. Wiktorowicz writes that “it seems reasonable to argue that the greater the role of Islam in an individual’s identity, the greater the likelihood he or she will respond to the opening through religious seeking” (2004b, p. 8). He categorizes the search into two different categories; self-initiated religious seeking and guided religious seeking. The first category is when the individual actively looks for religious answers themselves, and the second is when a movement or organization support the individual in their search, guiding them towards their own ideological beliefs (ibid., p. 9). Next, frame alignment is when ideology is presented as an answer to the problem. Frame resonance is extremely critical for the framing process. There must exist a frame of reference around the ideas of the radical group that resonates with the individual and attracts the individual’s interest (Wiktorowicz, 2004a, p. 16). The movement or group produce meaning and frames throughout the process. Jihadi-Salafist ideology is often presented as the answer to various grievances. When frame alignment is accomplished, the last stage of socialization and eventually joining the movement. In this stage, the individual becomes more willing to learn and study the ideological beliefs of the group and eventually adopts them as their own. After accepting the ideological beliefs of the movement socialization increases, fostering new social networks which eventually leads to
indoctrination and violent responses (ibid., p. p-10). These processes can take place within existing networks of friends or acquaintances, or in new connections by participating in debates, demonstrations, or study groups (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017, p. 206). Wiktorowicz writes that “the process is intended to alter the values of the individual so that self-interest is defined in accordance with the goals and beliefs of the movement ideology” (ibid.). Through this process, the individual undergoes an identity construction, altering their ideas and worldviews. While Wiktorowicz presents a comprehensive model for how individuals radicalize, the Al-Mujahiroun model offers little insight into the gendered dimensions of radicalization. This thesis will therefore utilize what is written on female jihad and radicalization, as presented in chapter two, in combination with Wiktorowicz’s model when analyzing the findings from this research.
4 Research Methodology

This chapter will outline and justify the methodology and research design used in this research project, as well as discuss the various challenges encountered during the work of this thesis. Methodological choices can have an important impact on all stages of the research process, from how one goes about finding the data, how these findings can be analyzed, and the various challenges and limitations surrounding data collection, managing, and analysis (Nygaard, 2017, p. 26). This chapter is divided into five main sections. The first section of this chapter will outline the research design chosen for this thesis, describing the case study design used for this research. The second section describes the data collection methods and the selection of informants. In the third section, the concepts of internal and external validity are dealt with to assess the stability of concepts and the study’s trustworthiness. The next section examines the challenges and limitations of the study, before turning my attention to the ethical considerations surrounding the research in the fifth, and final section.

4.1 Research Design

The main objective of this thesis is to provide an overview of the Norwegian women who traveled to join the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and answer some of the questions surrounding return to Norway. It also aims at exploring the underlying motivations for leaving, and explain the causes and processes of radicalization into violent extremism. Needless to say, these objectives are difficult to meet, as the phenomenon is complex and multifaceted. Therefore, the importance of finding a suitable methodological approach to conduct this research cannot be underestimated. The research design reflects my choices about the framework within which the data collection and analysis will take place, as well as the priority being given to the various aspects of the research process.

This thesis aims at adopting a qualitative research approach to best illuminate the problems that the research questions impose. Qualitative research usually gives priority to words rather than numbers and is considered a more open-ended research strategy than that of quantitative research (Bryman, 2016, p. 405). Considering the complex and multifaceted topic of this thesis, qualitative research allows for a better understanding of the how’s and why’s of the phenomenon through using qualitative research techniques. The Norwegian women who left for Syria and Iraq had been assigned many titles; jihadi brides, IS wives, female foreign fighters, muhajirat, and many more. Using qualitative research when investigating this phenomenon allows for a better understanding of a complex social phenomenon, as it allows
us to examine concepts that are not necessarily easy to define or measure (Nygaard, 2017, p. 128). Furthermore, the research pursues constructionist ontological traditions by focusing on the participants’ perceptions and understanding of the world, rather than accepting what we observe as true and given. Constructionism “implies that social phenomena are not only produced by through social interaction but are in a constant state of revision” (Bryman, 2016, p. 29-31). This ontological consideration is of importance when analyzing how the women’s motivations for joining the Islamic State and their motivations for staying there.

This research has chosen a critical approach to help answer the research questions and obtain the data needed for this purpose. Critical approaches, according to Nygaard, aims to look beyond what is evident and recognize social structures and power relations behind what we see (2017, p. 27). The aim with this research is to analyze the various underlying motivations of the Norwegian muhajirat, so that we could understand their underlying reasons for traveling to the Islamic State, as well as understanding the different factors behind their reasons to stay in the conflict-affected area. “Critical approaches are also aimed not just at explaining the world as it is now, but also trying to bring about social change – particularly with respect to hegemonies of gender, race, class, sexuality, or geopolitics” (ibid., p. 27). Critical approaches usually rely on interviews, life histories, and observations, amongst other techniques, to obtain the relevant information. This research has therefore chosen a critical approach to be able to obtain the relevant information through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, to look beyond what is evident to find underlying factors that may help explain the phenomenon, as well as putting the phenomenon into context.

4.1.1 Case Study Approach
As the aim of this thesis is to provide an overview of the Norwegian women who left to join the Islamic State, explaining their radicalization process and motivations for leaving is essential. However, as the background and the stories of the women are different, it is difficult to define specific motivations and reasons for leaving that are common to all of them. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the women’s motivations and common themes and factors in their radicalization process through a case study analysis. A case study “entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case” and “(...) is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question” (Bryman, 2016, p. 60). The case of the ten Norwegian women who left to join the Islamic State, and have not returned serves as the unit of analysis in this research. Other Norwegian women are also believed to have attempted to
travel to Syria to join the Islamic State, but have been stopped (VG, 2017), and one woman was taken by her husband to Syria but has returned (VG, 2016). These women are not included in this case study, as they are not included in the estimates presented by the PST. A case study approach appears to be the most appropriate research design for this thesis, as it concerns the complexities of a single case (Norwegian muhajirat) within a broader context. The larger context, in this case, can be ‘foreign fighters’, encompassing all individuals which travel to fight in a foreign conflict, while a narrower context could be ‘Norwegian migrants to the Islamic State’. Furthermore, a case study approach is chosen because of its ability to highlight and examine why people make the decisions they do and because it involves methodically collecting relevant data through interviews with specific people or groups to adequately understand their perception of a social phenomenon (Schramm, 1971, p. 6).

Using a case study approach when researching the topic of this thesis has various advantages. Firstly, it allows for an in-depth examination of a specific case, analyzing it as a part of a broader phenomenon (Bryman, 2016, p. 70). In the case of the Norwegian muhajirat, which is a complex and ongoing phenomenon since almost all the women are believed to still be in the IS-controlled areas, a case study design allows us to analyze “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). Secondly, as most academic research on radicalization and the Islamic State has focused on men, relatively little has been written on the topic of the Norwegian women who joined. Conducting a case study on a subject which is understudied or entirely new is useful in many ways, as it allows for a detailed investigation of the case, produce new information and insight and make suggestions for further research. Furthermore, as the main objective of this thesis is to investigate the “how” and the “why” questions, a case study approach is able to tackle these questions to a great extent, as it is more focused on the depth and complexity of a single case than other research designs (Bryman, 2016, p. 60). A case study design also allows for research on unique and infrequent circumstances, where drawing a large sample of similar participants is impossible due to the rare case. This is especially relevant for the case in this thesis, as only ten women out of the Norwegian population is known to have joined the Islamic State (TV2, 2018a).

4.2 Data Collection
I chose to undertake this research because of the threat that the Islamic State poses in the world today. It is believed that the West will face significant security challenges posed by the Islamic State, its supporters and those who return from IS (Reed, Pohl & Jegerings, 2017, p.
3; PST, 2018). In the Norwegian case, PST estimates that around 100 people left for Syria in the period between 2012 and 2016. Approximately 40 people unaccounted for, and ten of these are women (VG, 2018). This points to several important questions, such as why none of the women have returned, what will happen to those who do return, and what are the possible consequences for the individuals and the state if these people return with vile intentions. To obtain the relevant information I found it necessary to collect both primary and secondary data. Primary data is the information collected directly by the researcher (Bryman, 2016, p. 11). The primary data in this case study is derived from the interviews with the families and friends of the women, as well a social worker, an associate professor, and other women who have thought about traveling to the IS-controlled areas, and helped answer the research question and create a case focusing specifically on the Norwegian women traveling to Syria. Secondary data, on the other hand, is collected by someone other than the researcher (ibid.). The secondary data used in this case study is derived from various official documents, reports, periodicals and other scholarly sources, but draws particularly from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue’s database on foreign fighters. The secondary data collected helped establish the foundation on which the thesis is built, and gave additional insight and explanations where the primary data might be incomplete. Secondary data formed the basis of the literature review, on which the discussion is built, as well as the background and additional information throughout the analysis. The two types of data develop a unique understanding of the phenomenon by capturing diverse aspects of the same phenomenon through the variety of data collection methods.

4.2.1 Interviewing as a Method

Primary data for this thesis was obtained through in-depth interviews with different informants to provide insights into the lives of the women, both before and after they left Norway. A semi-structured questionnaire for interviews was developed to obtain relevant information from the respondents. A semi-structured interview allowed me to prepare important questions and topics beforehand in an interview guide and allowed the possibility of changing the sequence of the questions to adapt to the situation (Bryman, 2016, p. 468). Furthermore, the flexible interview process gave me the ability and freedom to formulate new questions and follow-up questions during the interview to capture and manage the evolving discussion. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews allow for a less structured conversation where the informants’ understanding of the phenomenon can become clearer, as well as the opportunity to address what they deem important (ibid., p. 696). This allowed me to adapt my
questioning to the situation, which was of great importance due to the sensitive topic of this thesis, as most of the respondents knew the women personally and understandably struggled to answer some of the more difficult questions. It is important to specify that the researched did not at any point attempt to make contact or conversation with any of the women to support or validate the statements from their relatives and friends. The primary data collected is therefore secondhand accounts about the women, as it could be deemed improper and extremely difficult to attempt to engage in conversation with any of the women themselves. Moreover, most of the interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting where I asked to meet the informant in a place that felt comfortable and safe for them, and at a time that suited their schedule. However, one interview was a phone interview while another took place in an e-mail exchange, as the informants were in other countries, and meeting them in person was difficult.

In the semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the families and friends of the women who left for Syria and Iraq, the informants talked about different precipitating causes that led the women to take the final step to leave for the Islamic State, as well as change in behavior and their lives during the last period before their departure. Moreover, in the interviews with their friends and other women who have thought about traveling, the discussion took a turn which made it possible to ask questions about why the interviewees decided to stay, unlike their friends. This allowed for a deeper understanding for why some people become radicalized to the point where they are willing to travel and join a terrorist organization, while others, exposed to similar factors and events, do not. Interviewing social workers and scholars proved to be extremely helpful, as they had worked closely with radicalized individuals and the families of the women who left.

4.2.2 Selection of Informants

In selecting informants for this study, the main criterion was a connection to the Norwegian muhajirat. This included friends, families, people who had worked with radicalized women, as well as women who had thought about leaving themselves. Initially, this study made use of purposive sampling in the selection of informants. Purposive sampling aims to choose participants for the study in a strategic way based on previous knowledge about these individuals and their experiences, and in this way, select the informants most relevant to answer the research question (Bryman, 2016, p. 694). By applying this sampling approach only relevant informants were contacted, which included friends and families of the women.
After conducting the first interviews, the study applied a snowball sampling approach, which allowed the initial informants to “suggest other possible interviewees who in turn suggest other, so the list of potential interviewees get longer and longer” (Desai & Potter, 2006, p. 148). This sampling approach allowed for more interviews in addition to the ones chosen by the purposive sampling approach. This again led to more relevant information being obtained, which contributed to the analysis and discussion in this study.

In total, I have carried out nine interviews with various informants, of which five of them were friends and families of the women who traveled. Two were of the interviews were with women who had thought about leaving for Syria themselves, one was an associate professor working with Islamist extremism and one was with a social worker who has worked closely with radicalized youths in Norway, as well as assisting the families of the women who traveled. In addition to the interviews, I have had informal conversations with academics, journalists and other professionals which have proved extremely helpful in understanding the phenomenon. All the interviews were conducted in Norwegian and later translated into English. As the number of women who left Norway was relatively low compared to other countries, the initial target was to interview at least one person with a connection to each of the ten women. However, finding informants was a challenge as little is publicly known about the women and even less is known about their network. Therefore, I was only able to interview the friends and families of five of the ten women. As a result, the analysis of this thesis focuses particularly on these five women when discussing motivations and radicalization. For the remaining five, the findings are drawn from secondary sources, such as media coverage on the women, as well as statements from the Norwegian Security Service.

4.3 Internal and External Validity

Validity “is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research” (Bryman, 2016, p. 41), and is of great importance to this study. What characterizes a case study in terms of validity is the question of how one study can be representative of other cases. Both internal validity and external validity is important for this thesis. First, internal validity concerns the matter of causality, while external relates to the issue of generalization (ibid., p. 41-42). Internal validity and causality are problematic in any social research. Drawing cause-effect conclusions, meaning the effect one variable x likely has on another variable y, is difficult in case study designs because the sample is small and because the effect may be brought about by various causes (ibid., p. 689). It is hard to determine
whether the effect we see in y is caused by variation in x. In the context of this study, y or the dependent variable represents the decision to travel to the Islamic State, while x or the independent variable represents the motivations and radicalization process. “Internal validity raises the question: how confident can we be that the independent variable really is at least in part responsible for the variation that has been identified in the dependent variable?” (ibid., p. 42). To encounter these problems, this thesis aimed at obtaining data from different sources to strengthen the internal validity of this study through triangulation. Triangulation is the obtaining of data from different sources to strengthen the validity of a research and widening the understanding of the topic (Olsen, 2004, p. 1-3). By interviewing the women’s families and friends, social workers and other women who have thought about leaving, data were gathered from different sources to make sure that the findings were not a result of my specific method or sources.

Second, external validity relates to the question of generalization and how the findings from one case can be representative of other cases (ibid., p. 62). On the one hand, if a research is externally valid, the results could be applied more generally to the wider population. On the other hand, if a research is not externally valid, the results yielded are only applicable to the sample of the research alone (ibid., p. 42). The problems of generalization are especially apparent in qualitative research. A common critique of qualitative research conducted with a small sample is that the findings are unable to say anything about the larger population (ibid., p. 399). Bryman argues, however, that the sample used in case studies are not meant to be representative for the wider population, but rather used to generalize theory. “In other words, it is the quality of the theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data that is crucial to the assessment of generalization” (ibid.). This is referred to by Yin (2009) as an analytical generalization and J. C. Mitchell (1983) as a theoretical generalization (ibid.). To overcome the problems of generalization in qualitative research, this research is careful not to generalize outward of what is possible for the limited amount of data gathered. As the data collected are specific to this specific case study only, generalization outside of this case is impossible. What may be true for these women, may not be true in other contexts.

4.4 Limitations and Delimitations

All social research has its limitations. Limitations, in the context of this work, describes what the thesis may not be able to capture. The limitations connected to this research has been briefly discussed in the different sections of this chapter. This section will discuss the most
important limitations for this thesis, building on what has already been discussed. The first and perhaps the most prominent limitation for this thesis, revolved around the problems of generalization. As it proved impossible to interview and gather data from all the relatives and friends of all the ten women, this study cannot generalize, but instead describes in depth how the families and friends perceived their decision to travel to Syria and Iraq and join what is now commonly known as a terrorist organization. Even though this thesis is unable to generalize, the data collected from the interviews retrieved valuable information that is important for the overall discussion on the phenomenon of women in the Islamic State.

Second, the lack of available information on the topic of this thesis is another limitation, mainly due to the secrecy and security issues surrounding the individuals. Because of the scarcity of available information, this research uses primary data obtained through interviews, scholarly sources, as well as information from the media to tackle this problem. Lastly, because of the sensitive topic of this thesis, finding and interviewing people close to the women was extremely difficult. While I was able to contact quite a few of the friends of the women, establishing contact with their families was much more difficult. Of the ones that I was able to get in touch with, only three were willing to participate in the study. One was contacted but did not want to be interviewed, which is understandable as it is an extremely delicate and vulnerable situation. One of the family members later wished to withdraw from the study, and the information that they provided is therefore not included in this thesis.

As for delimitations, which are conscious decisions to delimit oneself, some have been made to restrict the scope of this thesis and focus attention on the most essential parts of this phenomenon. This analysis will focus primarily on the Norwegian women who left to join the Islamic State, and only draw information from research on other groups when necessary or required. The choice to focus on this group in particular, and not male Norwegians or other nationalities signifies that the results presented in this thesis may therefore not represent all individuals who have left to join the Islamic State. Moreover, because of the sensitivity and security issues surrounding the topic of this thesis, I made a conscious decision to not attempt to contact the women directly. I was also instructed by the NSD not to contact the women directly, nor to write anything which could identify them or the informants which provided information on them. These limitations have implications for the results produced in this thesis, as all findings are secondhand accounts, and not of the women themselves. Finally, this thesis draws from Norwegian and English publications, as I am not proficient in Arabic or
other relevant languages. This may also limit the ability of the thesis to capture all aspects of the issue.

4.5 Ethical Considerations
Due to the sensitive topic of this thesis, ethical considerations were given much priority both before, during and after the data collection. When contacting the possible informants, it was important to explain the objective of the study as well as carefully asking permission to interview these individuals about something so sensitive. After giving their permission to be interviewed, I asked the participants to choose a time and location which suited them, to make them feel comfortable and relaxed during the interview, as the topic could be difficult for them to talk about. Before the interviews began, all informants were explained the objective of the research and were informed of what the material they provided would be used for. They were also informed that they were free to withdraw from the interview at any time or pull their answers during any time of the research. All the participants gave their consent to participate in the study, either verbally or written. Due to the somewhat controversial and personal nature of the topic of this study, all the participants were promised anonymity, as well as the individuals they provided information about. Therefore, none of the individuals studied for this research or the interviewees which provided information on these individuals are referred to by their real name. Any direct or indirect information which could possibly be used to reveal their identity has been carefully left out of this thesis. Moreover, no audio or video recording was used during the interviews, to further protect the participants of this study and the women they provided information on. The entire data material is anonymized and any direct identifying information is deleted at the end of the project, in accordance with NSD’s guidelines (Norwegian Centre for Research Data).
5 Findings and Analysis

This chapter aims at analyzing the findings in order to answer the research questions. This includes providing an overview of the Norwegian women who have left to join the Islamic State, followed by an account of radicalization processes, motivations, and push and pull factors that have determined and led these women to migrate to the Islamic State. The analysis is based on the information provided through interviews with support from the framework developed in chapter 3, as well as secondary sources such as news articles, official statements, and documents. The chapter proceeds into three main sections that coincide with the research questions; The first section will discuss why these women, who were seemingly well-integrated into the Norwegian society became attracted to the Islamic State’s radical ideology to the degree that they chose to join the organization. By examining the process of radicalization, this section discusses women’s pathway to the Islamic State through the Al-Muhajiroun model presented in chapter three. By interviewing other women who had thought about leaving, I was able to identify distinct factors and reasons that influenced these women to not join the terrorist organization which will be presented in the second part of this section. Lastly, this section will discuss the role of men in women’s radicalization process.

The second section aims at answering the second research question: What does the Islamic State offer women in comparison to that for the secular emancipation of women? Analyzing the environment that IS create for women inside the so-called caliphate allows us to compare it to that of what women are offered in Western societies. Outlining the promises that IS makes to their female members allows for a more thorough investigation of what makes it appeal to women. Moreover, by investigating the incorporation of women in the Islamic State through ‘gender-segregated parallel institutions’, we can discuss how women become integrated into the organization and the roles they inhabit. Comparing the life of women inside the self-proclaimed caliphate to that of Western society raises important questions of emancipation, feminism, secularization and religious freedom.

The final section traces the various motivations for joining the Islamic State, and for staying there. This section aims at utilizing empirical evidence to add to the understanding of individual motivations for joining terrorist organizations. While this section draws from secondary literature to contextualize the issue, the primary information is collected through a series of interviews with the friends and families of the women that traveled, experts on radicalization and extremism, as well as women who have considered joining the Islamic State. Through analyzing the women’s motivation for leaving, this section suggests that
grievances, solutions and personal motivations drive women towards the Islamic State. It will also outline the motivations for staying inside the so-called caliphate, compared to the women’s original motivations for leaving. Lastly, it will illustrate the implications surrounding the question of return, looking at both physical and psychological obstacles, as well as the Norwegian Penal Code.

5.1 Women’s Pathway to the Islamic State
As the above section demonstrate, the Norwegian women in this case study make up a multi-ethnic and diverse group, and due to their different background, their radicalization process differs. Therefore, establishing a common theoretical explanation for how these women radicalize is therefore difficult. However, what we do know from the interviews and secondary sources about the women’s lives before they left to join the IS generate some useful information which will be discussed in more detail. Building on the Al-Muhajiroun model by Wiktorowicz, this section investigates how the women could have been radicalized to the degree that they chose to join the Islamic State, utilizing the four stages in the model; cognitive opening, religious seeking, frame alignment, and socialization. In the interviews with the friends and families of the women who left for Syria and Iraq, the informants talked about different precipitating causes that led the women to take the final step to leave for the Islamic State, as well as change in behavior and their lives during the last period before their departure. I looked for both descriptions of feelings and concrete events, which could help explain the women’s radicalization process. While the context, duration and precipitating events of their radicalization differs, some commonalities and general patterns emerged.

5.1.1 The Radicalization Process
According to Wiktorowicz’s radicalization model, a prerequisite for joining an organization such as the Islamic State is the willingness to open up for its message. An individual can begin questioning previously held beliefs and become amenable to new ideas and worldviews after experiencing a crisis which generates a cognitive opening (2004, p. 7). Wiktorowicz categorizes the types of crises into economic, social/cultural, political and personal. While the data gathered for this research didn’t find any indication of economic crises, the political, social/cultural and personal categories were apparent in the interviews. Starting with political crises, most of the women had expressed some concern about the treatment of Muslims around the world. The civil war in Syria was often a topic when they talked to their friends, and they discussed the oppression of Sunni Muslims in the country on several occasions
(Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 2, March 2018; Interview 3, April 2018; Interview 8, July 2018). There seems to be some sort of development here; many of the women became more politically conscious over time when learning about the lives of other Muslims around the world affected by war and violence. As the women became more politically conscious, their frustration grew, and they felt like they had to do something (Interview 1, March 2018, Interview 2, March 2018, Interview 8, July 2018; Seierstad, 2017, p. 20-21). None of the women in this study is known to have experienced any form of repression, torture, political discrimination themselves, which is what Wiktorowicz describes as political crises, but they reacted to the oppression, torture and political discrimination of others. This wish to help their fellow Muslims is intensified through the Muslim group-identity known as the *Ummah*. The hardships and oppression experienced by Muslims are often perceived as a threat to the whole transnational identity group (Malet, 2013, p. 208). One interviewee felt that the political discrimination and oppression of Muslims in Syria threatened her identity as a Muslim woman, even though she had no connection to the country (Interview 7, June 2018).

One type of social/cultural crisis commonly experienced by the women is that of discrimination and harassment. In the interviews, a common theme amongst the informants was that the women had experienced some form of harassment because of their religious identity prior to their journey to the Islamic State (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 2, March 2018; Interview 3, April 2018; Interview 8, July 2018). Several of the women wore the traditional veil *niqab* before they left Norway, which made them visibly different compared to the rest of the population (ibid.). The discrimination and harassment left a feeling of non-belonging and the women felt excluded from the Norwegian society in which they had grown up in. One of the women, an active spokesperson for the right to wear the *niqab*, felt constantly ‘controlled’ by the Norwegian society according to her friend. The interviewee argues that the ongoing discussion on prohibiting *niqab* in school and in workplaces intensified the feeling of outsideness for this woman, as those wearing *niqab* are seldom included in these debates (Interview 1, March 2018). The woman had also been physically assaulted because of her face veil (Seierstad, 2017, p. 147). Discrimination was also a factor for why some of the interviewees had contemplated leaving Norway. One interviewee, a Norwegian convert to Islam said:

As soon as I started wearing the hijab, I experienced discrimination, verbal assault, and even physical attacks. It was like I suddenly wasn’t Norwegian enough anymore. And although I do not support the Islamic State, I can understand why some women want to escape the Norwegian society (Interview 7, June 2018).
What can be defined as personal crises according to Wiktorowicz’s definition were also evident in the interviews, although these were less common and more difficult to detect because of the individual and private factors. The most common experience by these women which could be defined as a personal crisis was regret over past life and a longing for religious redemption. Several of the interviewees argued that the women felt ashamed, regretful or distressed because of the life that they had lived (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 2, March 2018; Interview 3, April 2018; Interview 8, July 2018), and that this resulted in a wish to redeem themselves. Moreover, this crisis seems to have developed as a result of religious awakening for some women. One woman had expressed her eagerness to become more religious to her friend on several occasions and talked about the guilt she felt over the life that she had lived (Interview 2, March 2018). The changes these women experienced when starting to practice Islam more actively, and their longing for redemption can be interpreted as a personal crisis and is important for understanding what sparked their interest in more radical interpretations of Islam. One interviewee describes the situation for her friend as follows; “as she became more and more religious, she was constantly searching for the next step to becoming a better Muslim and to redeem herself” (ibid.). Another interviewee, talking about one of the other women, argues that “she had a dark and heavy past which made her want to change and make tawbah (repent)” (Interview 1, March 2018). Other personal crises were also evident in the interviews but were less common. At least two of the women in this study had experienced the loss of family members and others close to them at an early age (NRK, 2015; VG, 2015a), another woman had experience with drug abuse and self-harm (NRK, 2015), at least one had come from a violent home (Seierstad, 2017, p. 150), and finally, one of the women had gone through a difficult divorce, which left her as a single parent (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 8, July 2018). These personal crises can also be seen as further intensifying the political and social/cultural grievances. What we do find, however, is that only one woman had a criminal history, and few seem to come from vulnerable socioeconomic positions. These findings does not coincide with what PST and FKTS describes as commonalities between radicalized individuals in Norway.

However, the level of causality between these crises and their decision to join the Islamic State varies. While some women explained these crises as direct push factors to their friends for why they chose to join, others seem to be mere contributing ones. Moreover, the information gathered did not give any indication that the Islamic State itself fostered a
cognitive opening in the women through actively reaching out to them, but some believed that at least two of the women had been in contact with IS-members online (Interview 3, April 2018; Interview 6, June 2018). There are therefore reasonable grounds to suspect that the some of the women have been influenced by propaganda or members of the IS to some degree. For Norway, which is a non-conflict, Muslim-minority country, discrimination and social exclusion, seems the be the most common crisis experienced by the women, resulting in a feeling of non-belonging and a search for identity (Interview 5, June 2018). While more research is needed, it could be argued that these types of perceived grievances are likely to assist the progress of radicalization by facilitating an environment where Muslim women feel excluded.

The next step in Wiktorowicz’s model is when “the individual seeks meaning through a religious idiom” (2004b, p. 1). The cognitive opening can lead to religious seeking which can take two forms; it can be initiated by the individual herself, or it can be fostered by the movement through actively reaching out to the individual (ibid., p. 9). Although more research is needed, the women in this study appear to seem to fall under the category of “self-initiated religious seeking”. In the interviews the women are described as actively searching for answers, considering different interpretations before settling on the Islamic State. One interviewee describes her friend as becoming more and more extreme as time went by, searching for meaning in different places:

When she was in upper secondary school, she began practicing Islam and was like any other “normal” Muslim. She was the leader of the translators in Islam Net, and I perceived her as a happy and regular Muslim girl. Eventually, she became a little more extreme when the Prophet’s Ummah was formed. Many of those who used to engage in Islam Net’s activities then joined the Prophet’s Ummah, because they disagreed with Islam Net and believed that they did not promote “real” Islam. Finally, she became even more extreme when she got married (Interview 8, July 2018).

The woman married a prominent figure in PU and became pregnant. After some time, the relationship ended and they divorced, leaving her as a single mother to her child. This situation became extremely hard on her, and she grew frustrated (Interview 1, March 2018). Her friend remembers meeting her after some time, and noticing a drastic change: “I remember seeing her in the mosque one day after a long time and she had become extremely skinny. She was suffering from depression. I think she sought refuge in this extreme ideology because she felt a belonging there” (Interview 8, July 2018). Another interviewee argued that this woman had been ‘radical’ for a long time, but she had not found a belonging in either
Islam Net, nor the Prophet’s Ummah (Interview 1, March 2018), and had turned her attention to Jabhat al-Nusrah and eventually the Islamic State (Interview 8, July 2018).

For one of the other women, the religious seeking happened much more quickly as she started practicing Islam at the time when the Islamic State emerged. When the interviewee first became friends with the woman, she was not particularly religious and did not wear the hijab. Her religious search started while she was in upper secondary school, and her friend noticed a drastic change in her friend over a short period of time. “Everything changed fast. She went from nothing to everything over a short period of time. She gradually started wearing the hijab, then abaya, then jilbab, but it all happened very fast” (Interview 2, March 2018). The interviewee believes that it was a coincidence that her friend started searching for religious answers around the same time as the Islamic State grew in power and that her newfound interest in Islam made her an easy target for extreme interpretations of Islam. She describes her friend interest in the Islamic State as a result of her regretting the past, and for not finding a place where she fitted in:

She had a bad conscience for the life she had lived and tried to compensate by starting practicing Islam. When she left her old life behind she did not feel like she fit in anywhere, and that drew her towards the most extreme interpretations of Islam that she could find. If she had been accepted into the community she would never feel like she had to join the Islamic State to prove herself as a good Muslim (ibid.).

A commonality between many of the women in their search for religion was that they had heard about the Islamic State and had asked around in their community whether the group stood for a right interpretation of Islam or not (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 2, March 2018; Interview 3, April 2018, Interview 8, July 2018). Two of the people interviewed believed that the women had not been satisfied with the answers they got from their friends, families and religious leaders regarding the Islamic State, and had started investigating on their own. Moreover, they believed that the women had become influenced by other individuals online, and become convinced that the Islamic State was the right answer (Interview 2, March 2018; Interview 3, April 2018). There is no evidence in the data gathered that the women spoke to IS members or sympathizers online before they left, and it is therefore impossible to draw any conclusions regarding the influence of online social interaction in the religious seeking of these women.
Wiktorowicz’s research indicates the importance of communication with a charismatic leader in the frame alignment stage of radicalization. This research found no information which indicated that the women had been in contact with any authority figures of the Islamic State. Some of the women were however in close contact with important individuals inside the PU, which have been accused of supporting the Islamic State ideologically (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 4, May 2018; Interview 8, July 2018). As one interviewee pointed out, one important aspect of the IS frames which made it particularly appealing compared to other groups and organizations was the state-building project. The Islamic State’s enormous success of conquering territory and establishing a proto-state meant that they offered more than just narratives, they offered tangible proof of Islamic success (Interview 7, June 2018). One of the women were active in social media before she left, supporting the Islamic State openly in discussion with other Muslims. The interviewees which knew her said that she wanted to live in an Islamic State for a long time and that she had been ideologically convinced that the Islamic State was the right choice for her from the beginning (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 8, July 2018). Other women were more hesitant to declare their support for the Islamic State until right before they left (Interview 2, March 2018). Another commonality between several of the women was that many of them perceived joining the Islamic State as an individual duty. The Islamic State frames participation as obligatory for men and women (Saltman & Smith, 2015), and the Norwegian women seems to have adopted this belief as several of them had told their friends that it was obligatory for them too to make hijrah (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 2, March 2018; Interview 3, April 2018). Finally, one interviewee suggests that two of the women did not know what they traveled to until they had arrived in Syria. “They said that they left to work voluntarily, I don’t think they knew what the Islamic State was before they were well integrated into it. I suppose they accepted the ideology of IS as they became members” (Interview 3, April 2018). As the above accounts suggest, frame alignment is an on-going and evolving process and could happen at all stages.

According to the Al-Muhajiroun model, the final step in the radicalization process is socialization which eventually leads to joining. Wiktorowicz argues that the first three stages; cognitive opening, religious seeking and frame alignment need to happen before socialization and joining can take place. As mentioned, we cannot draw any conclusions about the interaction between the women and members of the Islamic State as we don’t have any evidence that such communication has taken place. What we do know however is that some of the women knew each other prior to leaving, and some of them also interacted with men.
which later traveled to Syria (Interview 5, June 2018). Social interaction in small networks, friend groups, or online was accentuated as central to radicalization by most interviewees. However, for at least two of the women, the adoption of ideology seems to have happened after socialization, and not vice versa (Interview 3, April 2018). For one of the other women, one interviewee believed that her process towards the Islamic State begun with socialization, and not the other way around as proposed by Wiktorowicz (Interview 6, June 2018). Women are often assumed to radicalize more online than men, as they are believed to be restricted in their movement in public places. However, the research found that all of the women in which I was able to gather primary data on had access to public spaces, whether that be the mosque, religious events, in school, or other public places in their area. It is therefore likely to assume that these women could have been radicalized offline, via the same procedures as men. Although more research is needed, it seems reasonable to assume that the socialization which happened inside these small networks further intensified the frames. Moreover, as there is no evidence that any of the women were in contact with individuals inside the Islamic State, it seems like socialization with IS-members and indoctrinations happens simultaneously.

It is apparent that the radicalization process varies between the different women in several aspects. The cognitive opening is clear in several of the cases in terms of political, social/cultural, and personal crises, while in other cases the data collected did not point to any specific event which may have resulted in a cognitive opening. Therefore, determining the causality between these types of crises and the decision to travel to Syria is difficult. Moreover, it is evident that most of the women underwent some form of socialization, either between themselves, in small friend groups, or with male IS-sympathizers in Norway, and the frames seem to have been intensified and adopted at this stage. It could also be that some of the women have socialized and radicalized online, but this research was unable to collect any data which supported such claims, and more research is needed to confirm or deny this. When it comes to the time aspect, there is a great variety between the cases. For some women, their radicalization process had taken several years, while for others, it happened relatively quickly in just a few months. While the Al-Muḥājiroon model implies that cognitive opening, religious seeking and frame alignment are necessary prerequisites for socialization and joining, this study found that these stages may have overlapped or happened simultaneously. It is necessary to repeat the problems of generalization here. What may be true for one of the women does not necessarily reply to others, and although parts of their radicalization process have been identified here, others remain undiscovered.
5.1.2 Leaving or Staying?
The interviews with the women’s friends and other women who have thought about traveling generated important notions as to why some people join the Islamic State, whilst others, exposed to the same environment and influences do not. All of the interviewees which were friends of the women who traveled to join the Islamic State had once thought about leaving. One interviewee described the interest in the Islamic State in the Muslim community:

When it became known that there would be an Islamic "caliphate", many were excited. This was IS and many supported them, but when they saw how cruel they were, most Muslims stopped supporting them. Many were young and naïve, without much knowledge of Islam. So, when they gained knowledge and scholars went out to condemn IS and their actions, there were many who departed from this ideology (Interview 8, July 2018).

While all the women had been intrigued by the Islamic State at some point in time, their interest decreased when they became aware of the extensive use of violence in the so-called caliphate (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 2, March 2018; Interview 3, April 2018; Interview 7, June 2018). Early on, when the caliphate was just declared, many were unsure of what was right. “You are presented with to completely different realities. There is a huge contrast between what media and IS portrays, I believed that the truth lied somewhere in between” (Interview 1, March 2018). The interviewee stated that it could easily have been her that left, however, when Islam Net and other prominent scholars of Islam went out and condemned the actions of IS, she decided that she would not go (ibid.). The condemnation of IS by internationally acknowledged scholars of Islam could help explain why the majority of Muslims lost interest in IS and did not adopt the frames presented by the so-called caliphate. For others, it was their obligations to their family which held them back. One of the interviewees explained that she would never risk bringing their children to Syria, as it was too dangerous. “I am simply too scared of dying and I would never put my children in that situation” (Interview 2, March 2018). Similarly, another interviewee said: “After I had kids it never even occurred to me to travel, there are other things you can do to help the Ummah apart from joining the Islamic State” (Interview 1, March 2018). Moreover, three of the interviewees were converts to Islam, and they problematized the violent attitudes IS have towards non-Muslims. The thought of joining an organization which condemned their non-Muslim family members were disturbing to these women and was emphasized by one of the interviewees as the main reason for why she chose to stay behind: “I have a non-Muslim
family. The idea that they in IS would not hesitate to kill them scares me” (Interview 7, July 2018). The women interviewed for this thesis seem to have been affected by a number of factors in their decision to stay behind. The most common factor was the failure to adopt the frames presented by IS. Other factors identified were obligations to family and children, violent attitudes towards non-muslims, other options to help aside from joining, and fear of dying.

For other women, the thought of joining the Islamic State was much more tempting. One woman, which was denied marrying the man she loved by her family, said that she would easily have gone if he had asked her to. When reflecting back on the situation, she says:

I never thought I would consider traveling or even become a practicing Muslim, but I did everything for him. I am sure of one thing; if at the time, he had told me to travel, I would have gone without hesitating (Interview 4, May 2018).

Furthermore, when the people around her started criticizing the change in her she became even more tempted to leave, as she reacted strongly to the people who made it difficult for her to practice Islam (ibid). While the woman was earnestly considering traveling to Syria to live inside the so-called caliphate, she was not tempted by the ideology nor the religious aspect of joining, but rather that she could be able to marry and live with the man she loved. She chose to stay behind as the man never asked her to travel, and they eventually broke up (ibid.).

5.1.3 Male Influence and Female Agency

As mentioned, only two of the women in this study is known to have made the journey to the Islamic State accompanied by a man. One of these women has been accused of luring her husband into joining the Islamic State. She is described by media as the one promoting the radical beliefs in the relationship, which eventually led to their departure for Syria in 2014 (VG, 2015a; NRK, 2015). The woman, a convert to Islam, “was the one in the relationship who had immersed herself more into the teachings of Islam after studying religion abroad and was therefore the most ideologically convinced before their departure” (Interview 9, July 2018). This contradicts the argument by many scholars that it is women who follow men into terrorism. Turning the attention to two other women of Somali origin, Van Leuven et al. argues that “Older girls and young women are also lured with promises of romance and marriage to ISIL fighters. For some, such as girls of Somali origin, migrating to choose their husbands outside ‘Xeer, or clan/family control or patriarchal structures” (2016, p. 106). Two
of the women in this study is of Somali origin, and whether this is true in their case is difficult to confirm, but the Norwegian police argue that these women left to be reunited with their boyfriends (NRK, 2015), and at least one of the two women have married a man with a different origin than Somali (Interview 3, April 2018).

Women’s motivations for joining the Islamic State has often included that of marriage. However, during the interview with the friend of one of the Norwegian women, she had expressed that she did not want to get married at all. Her friend believes that this was still true when she traveled to the Islamic State, as she stayed at an all-women hostel for a long period after arriving in Syria. Moreover, her friend thinks that as she realized what her life would be without a husband inside the so-called caliphate, she had to get married (Interview 2, March 2018). Women inside the IS warn other women about traveling to the area without the intention of getting married, one woman writes on Twitter: “Sisters wallah being single in sham is extremely difficult, it’s best if you’re not married when coming, to mentally prepare yourself” (Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 23). The young woman eventually got married and announced this on her Facebook page in May of 2015. Her friend believes that she became the second wife of a Norwegian man (Interview 2, March 2018).

When turning the attention to the women interviewed who had thought about leaving but not gone, two different narratives appear. For the first woman, her contemplation over traveling to Syria was clearly influenced by the men in her life. One of her close family members were living inside the so-called caliphate, and her brother-in-law later joined the Islamic State as well. The man she was in love with had facilitated the journey for others in the Norwegian Muslim community, including the woman’s close family member. Her thoughts surrounding participation in the Islamic State was openly affected by the man in her life, and she said that if it wasn’t for him she would never even have considered traveling to Syria (Interview 4, May 2018). For another woman, who was not married and not in a relationship, the thought about joining the Islamic State was sparked by a desire to help the Muslim community in Syria. When asked about her thoughts about marriage and the Islamic State, she denies that her intention was that of marriage: “I never thought about marriage. I would never travel to a war-torn country to find a husband. But then again, living under Shariah law without a mahram seems impossible” (Interview 7, June 2018). Although these women carefully considered traveling to Syria to join the Islamic State, they cannot be defined as radical according to the definition provided in chapter 3, as they had not developed extremist ideologies and beliefs. Moreover, as these women were not radicalized their cases is more
about understanding emotions rather than explaining based on theory. These accounts show that women have considered joining the Islamic State without being radical, and without necessarily prescribing to the ideology of IS. Whether this is true for any of the women who joined is difficult to say, but we can not rule it out completely.

While it could be argued that the women contribute to their own subordination by joining the Islamic State, this study finds that joining the IS does not necessarily entail the absence of autonomy and agency. The women which I was able to gather primary data on were all active in their decision to join the Islamic State, and seems to have chosen to travel after carefully considering their options (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 2, March 2018; Interview 3, April 2018; Interview 8, July 2018). While it is problematic to ascertain the role of men in women’s radicalization, the findings presented here indicate that even if the women were affected by men in their choice to make hijrah, this still does not deprive them of agency, as the decision to travel include complex processes where the women were actively opposing the authority structures in their families, cultures, and societies. While this study has pointed out some important aspects of female radicalization in the Norwegian context, there is still much that is not known about the women’s pathway towards the Islamic State. More research is needed to further our understanding of why women become radicalized to the degree that they are willing to leave their home country to join a terrorist organization in a foreign country, why others do not, and what role male influence plays in radicalizing women.

5.2 A Divine Alternative

Having discussed how the women may have been radicalized, this next section moves on to answer why the women may have chosen the Islamic State. Perhaps the most puzzling question related to the women who joined the Islamic State is what attracts them to it. What makes these women leave their comfortable life in the West to travel to join an organization which is known for its strict and harsh interpretation of Shariah law, limiting almost all aspects of women’s lives? It is possible to assume, that in the eyes of the women who join, the Islamic State offers them something which is unattainable in Western societies. This section outlines what the Islamic State offers women, discussing how women are incorporated into the organization’s different institutions through ‘gender-segregated parallel institutions’, and examine the importance of religious redemption compared to that of secular emancipation for these women.
5.2.1 What Does the Islamic State Offer Women?

In analyzing the propaganda released by the Islamic State and the online posts by its members, we can identify seven distinct promises by IS to women. First, they can fulfill their individual religious duty (*Fard al-Ayn*) by emigrating to the IS-controlled territories and swearing allegiance to the Islamic State and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Second, they can participate in building an Islamic Utopia by holding professions such as teachers, doctors or nurses. Third, IS propaganda emphasizes the feeling of belonging inside the so-called caliphate, appealing to Muslim women in the West experiencing discrimination and isolation because of their religion or ethnicity. Sisterhood has been described as another promise for women, particularly in the un-official propaganda in social media posted by women themselves. Next, the bold decision to travel to a conflict-affected area creates a sense of adventure and excitement, both in undertaking the journey and in living within the territory controlled by the Islamic State. The promise of romance is important for women from Western countries, as marriage is considered an important part of Islam. Status is also another factor here, as by marrying a jihadist fighter, women run the risk of becoming a widow in young age, but this is looked upon as an honorable status within the so-called caliphate. Lastly, influence, honor, and glory are described as important promises to Muslim women, and by joining the Islamic State they can help restore the lost power to Muslims (Tarras-Wahlberg, 2017). Altogether, these promises paint a perfect picture of life as a Muslim woman inside the Islamic State, where they can fulfill their religious duty and actively contribute to society in different ways. In return, they can experience adventure, belonging, sisterhood and romance, and earn respect, status, and influence by making the bold choice to migrate.

In her analysis of *Dabiq*, the Islamic State’s online magazine, Ingram finds that the Islamic State’s media campaigns target women specifically, and appeal to women by playing on identity, empowerment, and belonging. These appeals offer a solution to the perceived grievances for Muslim women living in Western countries (2017, p. 4-8). Seeking a better future in the Islamic State, where Muslim women are valued and not discriminated against based on their religious beliefs and the way they dress, is relevant for the women in this case study, as most of them wore *hijab* and *niqab*, and had experienced harassment and prejudice because of this. As women are more visibly different because of the way they dress, they often experience more discrimination and prejudice in Western societies than their male counterparts (Van Leuven et al., 2016, p. 103). The promises of the Islamic State could therefore have resonated strongly with these women, as they would be valued and respected
for covering, rather than discriminated for their choice of clothing. Moreover, the Islamic State frames female participation as obligatory and claims to have created a ‘safe-haven’ for women where they can fulfill their roles as Muslims, wives, and mothers (Winter, 2015). This gendered construction of identity offers a solution to the perceived grievances related to exclusion from Western societies’ concepts of feminism and emancipation. One interviewee explained that Muslim women in the West can struggle to balance their religious and female identity because they are not included in the secular feminist agenda. Although this woman did not support the Islamic State, she believed that in the eyes of those women who join, the IS offers “a place where women are free to be women, without compromising their religious beliefs” (Interview 7, July 2018). Similarly, Zakaria argues that:

The act of joining ISIL can be seen as a militant rebellion against the enduring Western construction of the Muslim woman as the lesser feminist. This in turn makes ISIL’s vision of gender relations — which is based on segregation and separation rather than equality and parity — appear original, authentic and even empowering in the eyes of those who are joining the group (2015).

The Islamic State has successfully established what Khelghat-Doost calls ‘gender-segregated parallel institutions’, where women are effectively incorporated into the organization’s different institutions such as administration, security, education, and healthcare by creating separate women-only sections (2017, p. 21). This allows for women to actively participate in almost all aspects of running the proto-state without intermixing between the genders, which adheres to the strict Shariah rulings of the organization. An example of one such institution is the Al-Khanssaa Brigade. Other examples are women sections of hospitals, tax collecting systems, female housing and sheltering divisions, and girl’s schools. The Islamic State has even established an English language girl’s school for the daughters of migrants from the West. “Through these parallel institutions, IS challenges the Western secular (in its eyes, sinful) emancipation of women and, instead, offers its own version, which includes the benefit of divine redemption” (Khelghat-Doost, 2017, p. 21).

Moreover, the Islamic State has created a practical solution to the religious obstacle of mahram by establishing these institutions by and for women. One of the Norwegian women worked in a women-only section of a hospital shortly after her arrival in Syria, while staying in an all-women hostel. The woman had no education within the field and had only completed upper-secondary school in Norway (Interview 2, March 2018). Through working in an IS-
driven hospital, the woman was given an opportunity which would have been unattainable in Western societies. Firstly, she was allowed to work without any educational background in medicine; secondly, she did not have to compromise by changing her clothes or appearance; and lastly, she was able to work in an environment without intermixing between the genders. However, this work stopped when the woman got married (ibid.). According to another interviewee, one of the Norwegian women is believed to have worked with disseminating propaganda for the Islamic State (Interview 1, March 2017). Although I was unable to find any empirical evidence to support this supposition, the woman had actively tried to convince other women to join the Islamic State through her personal Facebook account after arriving in Syria. But again, after the woman got married and became pregnant, she disappeared from the internet and her friend never heard from her again (ibid.). By creating these parallel institutions, the Islamic State has been able to incorporate women into its system without compromising with religion, allowing the women to follow the teachings of Islam, and at the same time contribute to the society. From these cases, we can assume that it is likely that some women are allowed to take on work outside of the home as long as it does not interfere with her obligations as a wife or a mother, as this is considered a woman’s primary role within the so-called caliphate (Winter, 2015, p. 22). The roles and contributions of women involved in terrorism have changed with the Islamic State. Khelghat-Doost argues that by establishing ‘gender-segregated parallel institutions’ “IS has pushed the boundaries of women’s utilization in jihadi organizations beyond combat tactical capacities” (2017, p. 23).

5.2.2 Secular Emancipation vs. Religious Redemption

The Islamic State’s promises to Muslim women create an alternative narrative of religious redemption compared to that of secular emancipation. It presents women with an opportunity where they are free to practice religion, and at the same time fulfill their roles as women. IS’ online magazine, Dabiq, has its own section directed at a female audience. The recurring theme in these articles is that of empowerment and identity. Ingram argues that the online magazine presents women with “a solution to their crises by framing hijrah as the rational choice as well as a movement which will not only empower and give their lives meaning but will also simultaneously strengthen IS and weaken the enemy” (2017, p. 7). For Muslim women living in Western societies, the Islamic State presents a different narrative than that of secular emancipation and that of traditional family gender norms. The propaganda released from IS clearly outline the roles for women, following the strict guidelines of Shariah law (Ingram, 2017), and presents these women with an alternative identity, where their roles as
women and as Muslims are fulfilled. One woman writes that “We are created to be mothers and wives – as much as the western society has warped your views on this with a hidden feminist mentality” (Umm-Layth, in Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 46). Similarly, the manifesto released by the Al-Khansaa Brigade discusses at length the failure of the Western model for women, arguing that the female emancipation and feminism of the West have corrupted women’s minds from fulfilling their fundamental roles as wives and mothers (Winter, 2015, p. 17-19). To the Muslim women in the West who feel left out of the feminist movement, and seeks atonement, joining the Islamic State may appear as an appealing solution as divine redemption is promised to the women who leave everything behind and come join the Islamic State. The biological differences between men and women are emphasized in the manifesto, arguing that following these biological differences, men and women should have different roles within the society to prevent it from falling apart:

Women have this Heavenly secret in sedentariness, stillness and stability, and men its opposite, movement and flux, that which is the nature of man, created in him. If roles are mixed and positions overlap, humanity is thrown into a state of flux and instability. The base of society is shaken, its foundations crumble and its walls collapse (Winter, 2015, p. 19).

Some of the women in this study had clearly stated their frustration with the Western feminist agenda and the problems of relating their Muslim identity into this context. One of the interviewees which had considered leaving, argued that it feels like Western feminism and the concept of emancipation does not include Muslim women: “Am I not free if I choose to cover? Am I not free if I follow the laws of God which I believe to be right? Why should I have to change to be considered ‘free’?” (Interview 7, June 2018). Similarly, one of the women who left described her right to wear the niqab as feminism, her right to dress the way she wanted (Seierstad, 2017, p. 147). These notions of emancipation and freedom linked to female dress and appearance were pointed out by several interviewees as a common adversity for Muslim women in Norway (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 3, April 2018; Interview 6, June 2018; Interview 7, June 2018). As several of these women had experienced discrimination and harassment for their choice to cover, they felt like they were being excluded from the Norwegian society as well as the Western feminist agenda. At least one of the women had explained to her friend that this was a major motivation for leaving Norway and that she wanted to live somewhere would she would not be discriminated for her choice to cover (Interview 1, March 2018). Although more research is needed, it seems reasonable to
suspect that the Norwegian women who joined the Islamic State saw the strict gender segregation and rules of IS as an opportunity to practice their idealized feminine gender roles.

Through the promises for women, ‘gender-segregated parallel institutions’, the promise of redemption, and the construction of gender roles, IS reinforces the offer of an alternative narrative of emancipation to that of the West. Arguing that women should fulfill their duty of wife and mother above all else, the Islamic State creates an undeniable and real alternative for women, where their femininity is valued, not as sexual objects, but as active contributors to the IS cause (Saltman & Smith, 2015, p. 18). Whether the female migrants to the Islamic State can be defined as fighting for a feminist cause has been much debated, and while some women argue that their choice to travel to the Islamic State and live under Shariah law is a feminist cause, Jacoby writes that “In pursuing traditional roles, however, women’s participation can detract from a long-term feminist agenda” (2015, p. 540). The findings from this research show that for the women who feel like they do not belong in the West and who see the feminist agenda as a destruction of their role as women, given to them by God himself, may find the alternative narrative of divine redemption tempting.

5.3 Understanding Motivations

There has been a growing body of research on the motivations and roles of Western women in the Islamic State. Motivations, as described in the literature review, are usually categorized into grievances, solutions and personal motivations, or push and pull factors. In this section, the aim is not to repeat these, but use these categorizations to contextualize the Norwegian women’s motivations. In the interviews with the friends and families of the women who left for Syria and Iraq, the informants talked about different precipitating causes that led the women to take the final step to leave for the Islamic State, as well as change in behavior and their lives during the last period before their departure. I looked for both descriptions of feelings and concrete events, which could help explain the women’s motivations for leaving. For the informants which had been in contact with the women after they left, motivations for staying and the question of return were also discussed. While the individual motivations differ from woman to woman, and each person’s experience was unique, some clear commonalities began to emerge throughout the research, as well as similarities in their emotional processes.

5.3.1 Grievances, Solutions and Personal Motivations

Throughout the interviews with friends and family, various motivations were described, and while some were mere conjectures based off of the changes the participants noticed in the
women, other motivations were described by the women themselves either publicly through social media, or privately to their friends and families. Throughout the interviews, three distinct motivations began to emerge, and although these were expressed in different ways, they were common for all of the women to some degree, regardless of their radicalization process, background or time of departure: (1) experiences of discrimination or harassment, resulting in a feeling of isolation or non-belonging; (2) outrage over what was happening in Syria, a wish to help build the caliphat and/or obligation to perform *hijrah*; (3) search for redemption, recognition, and identity. These motivations can be categorized into grievances, solutions and personal, similar to those presented by Hoyle et al. While these motivations were the most common throughout the case study, additional individual motivations emerging were: adherence to the Islamic State’s ideology, seeking recognition or status, search for identity, meaning and belonging.

Starting with what can be categorized as grievances, the majority of the women were known to have experienced discrimination or harassment due to their Muslim identity at some point before their departure, as discusses in the previous chapters. Several of the interviewees linked the lack of social acceptance of religious clothing and appearance to the perceived feelings of discrimination, exclusion and social marginalization (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 2, March 2018; Interview 3, April 2018; Interview 7, June 2018). Some women had described that they felt ‘controlled’ and persecuted by the Norwegian society because of their Muslim identity (Interview 1, March 2018), others felt that “the Norwegian society did not have any room for people like her” (Interview 2, March 2018), while one described that she felt isolated in the Norwegian society (Interview 3, April 2018). As several of the interviewees pointed out, these experiences and impressions resulted in a feeling of discontent towards the West in general, and the Norwegian society in particular (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 2, March 2018; Interview 3, March 2018). The feelings of social and cultural alienation were amongst the most common motivations described in the interviews. Non-belonging was emphasized by a social worker from Bærum Municipality, where four of the women came from. He argues that outsideness is the main reasons for why these women left, arguing that: “If they feel like they are not accepted into the society, they seek belonging and affiliation elsewhere” (Interview 5, June 2018).

This study found that nine out of ten women had expressed a wish to help the population in Syria at some time before or after their departure. In a video from 2013, one of the women said that she wished to remain in Syria forever and frames participation in IS as “the struggle
for the weak, the fight against injustice” (NRK, 2015, my translation). In another case, where two sisters traveled to Syria together, their explanation for leaving, as they explained to their family, was humanitarian, arguing that in order to help the *Ummah* it was not enough anymore to sit at home and send money. The girls needed to be with the people who suffered in order to help them (Seierstad, 2017, p. 20-21). Another woman described her commitment to helping people suffering in the Middle East on her blog (NRK, 2015). Although this wish to help was expressed in different ways by the different women, the transnational Muslim identity can help to explain why these women felt the need to help. The emotional process leading up to their departure is likely to have been influenced by the suffering of Muslims around the world, as the women felt empathy for the Syrian population. This wish to help was also described as further intensified through international inaction (Saltman & Smith, 2015; Hoyle et al., 2015; Cook & Vale, 2018).

After arriving in Syria and joining the Islamic State, several of the women had publicly or privately to their friends and family, explained that *hijrah* was an individual duty upon all believing Muslims, and in some instances even tried to convince their friends back home to join them. One of the women had reached out to her friend, telling her to travel to the IS-controlled areas: “She told me that it was my duty as a Muslim to join the Islamic State, and asked me to bring my husband and children. She explained the benefits of living inside the caliphate, such as housing and money” (Interview 2, March 2018). The wish to help build the caliphate was also emphasized as an important motivation one of the women, which had described to her friend after she arrived that she felt like she could finally contribute with something that was of importance to her (Interview 3, April 2018). For others, these solutions seem to be of less importance than the perceived grievances.

She just wanted to move away from Norway, she felt so distanced from the Norwegian society that she just wanted to leave. The Islamic State was an easy way out for her because she could escape the evil and at the same time contribute with something good (Interview 1, March 2018).

The benefits of joining the Islamic State seems to have been just a mere afterthought for this woman. Two interviewees explained that she had been ‘looking for a way out’ for a long time and that the rise of the Islamic State was the most accessible solutions, as all she needed to do was “buy a plane ticket and go” (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 8, July 2018). While Saltman & Smith describe belonging and sisterhood as the main factor driving women towards the Islamic State (2015), this study found that only one woman had cited belonging
as a motivation for leaving (Interview 2, March 2018). However, it seems reasonable to assume that belonging may have been an important motivation for several of these women, as most of them had expressed a feeling of non-belonging in the Norwegian society, even though most the interviewees argued that the women had a large social group and several close female friends before they left.

As for personal motivations, the wish for redemption was cited as the most important throughout the interviews. Several of the informants spoke about the women’s lives before they started practicing religion more strictly, and a commonality between their lives was that they had done things they regretted and wanted to make up for these actions (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 2, March 2018; Interview 3, April 2018; Interview 8, July 2018). This motivation is anchored in religious beliefs, as the Islamic State creates a narrative of divine redemption for all individuals that join. Another personal motivation emerging from the interviews was the search for identity. One interviewee described that her friend had undergone a dramatic change in the period before she left to join the Islamic State, and said that: “She was trying to find herself, I think she felt misunderstood as she became more religious and that she didn’t know who she was” (Interview 2, March 2018). Similarly, another interviewee, in describing one of the other women, stated that: “She felt like she was not Norwegian enough and not foreign enough. She was then left with only her Muslim identity, and as you cultivate that single identity long enough, it will eventually go wrong” (Interview 1, March 2018). Finally, some of the women are believed to be actively seeking recognition and status through joining the Islamic State, motivations which are more frequently associated with men. One interviewee, talking about her friend which traveled, said: “I think she was seeking some kind of recognition or status. She wanted to prove her religiosity by choosing the most extreme alternative” (Interview 2, March 2018). Along the same lines, one of the other women wanted to join the Islamic State because “she wanted to do all the right, and most radical things, in order to ‘prove herself’ to her surroundings” (Interview 1, March 2018).

One interesting finding is that none of the participants for this study cited romance or marriage as a motivation for any of these women, which is often cited as a common reason for why women join terrorist organizations, as described above. On the contrary, one interviewee argued that her friend did not want to marry at all (Interview 2, March 2018), and others talked about the misconception of these women as ‘jihadi brides’ (Interview 1, March 2018; Interview 7, June 2018), and while we cannot generalize outside of these findings, it seems
very likely that few of the women were primarily motivated by romantic factors. Moreover, this study found that ideology was not cited as a major motivation for traveling. Lars Gule argues that in the Norwegian context, ideology is just a very small part of the understanding for why individuals travel, and in some cases, not a reason at all (Interview 9, July 2018). Lastly, all of the interviewees for this study emphasized what can be defined as grievances or push factors in describing the women’s motivations for joining the Islamic State, and solutions, personal motivations or pull factors seemed to be of less importance.

We can understand the women’s motivations through their constructed identities and realities, as many them believed that their identity was in danger because of what was happening to Muslims all over the world and because they believed that it was their responsibility to help the Umah. Moreover, it seems likely that the transnational identity-group created a solution to their identity crises because it unites people across age, gender, class, and race. The motivations outlined above could help explain why the Norwegian women chose to join IS, however, like Hegghammer argues, it is extremely difficult to know if this is the main motivation, as not all reasons for joining are declared publicly (2014, p. 281). Moreover, it is impossible to establish causality between these motivations and the women’s decision to travel as this research did not include the women themselves in the interviews, and because the reasons and motivations for travel are multi-causal and complex, and differ from individual to individual.

5.3.2 No Turning Back?

The PST estimate that a total of 100 men and women have traveled to Syria and Iraq, where one in ten affiliates where women. As the Islamic State has faced enormous setbacks, losing both territory and power throughout Iraq and Syria, several European countries have experienced an exodus where men, women, and children have returned to their home countries (McCarthy, 2017). The PST reported in 2017 that 40 individuals have returned, all of which were male (Aftenposten, 2017). There have not been any new returnees in 2018, and the PST evaluate it as “unlikely that a larger proportion of the Norwegian associated foreign fighters in the conflict area will return in the coming year” (2018, p. 17-18). Moreover, 30 Norwegian citizens are considered dead, having been killed in battle in Syria or Iraq. All the deceased are also believed to be male (NRK, 2018). That leaves 30 individuals unaccounted for. If we assume that these individuals are still alive, that means that the women now make up 33.3% of the total number of Norwegians in the area. If we include the children born by Norwegian mothers in these numbers, the women and their children make up 60% of the total
number of Norwegian citizens. This coincides with the findings of ICSR, which found that the number of female returnees is lower than that of the male in almost all European countries (2018, p. 47-48). This also raises important questions as to what is keeping them there.

The families of five of the Norwegian women claim that the women are in Syria against their own will. One father argues that his daughter left voluntarily, but that she regrets her decision and wants to return (TV2, 2014). The Secretary-General of Islamsk Råd Norge says in an interview with TV2 that the IRN have tried to assist the families of these girls by contacting various government agencies, but that this work has not lead anywhere (ibid.). We know that one woman has managed to escape the Islamic State with her husband and son, and is now currently being held in a refugee camp in the Kurdish-controlled areas of northwestern Syria, claiming that she is no longer a part of the Islamic State (NRK, 2018). At least two of the women have been arranged to be rescued out by their families, but they did not show up (Interview 5, June 2018; Zaman, 2016). Moreover, there is no way of ascertaining if the remaining women are alive, as I was unable to find any information confirming this. As Ikhlaque Chan argues, that there could be a chance that some of the women have been killed inside the IS-held areas (Interview 5, June 2018; Cook & Vale, 2018, p. 59). After Raqqa fell, Chan read through documents recovered from the IS-held territories searching for the Norwegian members. He did not find any of the Norwegian men or women in these documents. However, this could be explained by the common tradition of name changing once inside the so-called caliphate. He argues that the Kunyas (an Arabic honorific nickname, usually derived from the first-born child) of the Norwegian men and women are not all known or they could have been changed several times (Interview 5, June 2018).

If we assume that these women are still alive and living inside IS-controlled areas, it is important to investigate their motivations for staying. Bloom argues that what motivates women to remain in terrorist organizations may be different from their original inspirations and motivations for joining (2011b, p. 11). While some women may still be ideologically convinced that the Islamic State is worth fighting for, like PST argues (NRK, 2017), some of the interviewees think that the women’ motivations may have changed. One interviewee believes that her friend has no other option but to stay: “She cannot return, as there is nothing to return to. To leave the Islamic State would be a big risk, as the organization executes apostates. If she comes back she will be imprisoned” (Interview 2, March 2018). Similarly, another interviewee said:
She does not have a choice anymore, she must just accept her life as it is now. If you have sworn faithfulness to the Islamic State and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi there is little you can do to escape it. Leaving is punishable by death. She also has a responsibility for her family and divorce is not an option with her child. She has said that she will never come back, as there is nothing to return to as the Norwegian society is rotten – she is much better off there (Interview 1, March 2018).

As the self-proclaimed Islamic State is not regarded as a genuine state by the international community, it will most likely dissolve and its members will go into hiding, or return to their home countries as it is losing both territory and power throughout Syria and Iraq (The Spectator, 2016, p. 3). Western foreign fighters returning to their home countries in the West presents a significant security threat (TESAT, 2017, p. 14). The United Nations has urged all nations to “prohibit, criminalise and prosecute their own nationals who attempt to or succeed in joining ISIL” (Van Leuven et al., 2016, p. 99), in an attempt to impede the further growth of the Islamic State. But the trend of returnees from the Islamic State causes confusion.

Return statistic argues that women leave the Islamic State at a lower rate than men. The ratio is one to four according to the ICSVE (2017, p. 10). Cook and Vale found that in 2015 there were only two accounts of female returnees to Western countries, whereas 30% of men who had traveled returned that same year. So why don’t the women return? There are several possible explanations which can help explain the modest number of female returnees.

Speckhard & Yayla argue that it is physical obstacles, such as financial means and restricted movement, which keeps the women from leaving IS (2017, p. 10). Along the same lines, Cook & Vale argue that “women were also often unable to travel freely without a mahram (male guardian), making the opportunity to escape and return if desired more challenging, particularly for those with children” (2018, p. 47). All migrants also hand over their passport when arriving in IS-territory as a sign of loyalty to the group, making leaving the group even harder. For the woman who has managed to escape with her husband and child, the physical obstacles are different. As she is held in Kurdish-controlled refugee camp, extradition is problematic as Kurdistan is not regarded as a nation-state, causing a diplomatic dilemma for Norway regarding. Psychological obstacles, such as fearing being labeled an apostate and fearing repercussions such as the death penalty, can also be considered important factors for why women don’t leave the IS. Moreover, leaving the Islamic State could be psychologically challenging for two reasons; firstly, after having been a member of the Islamic State for a long time, admitting that they have been wrong can be extremely difficult, and secondly, by
admitting that they have been wrong entails implying that all the other members of IS are wrong as well (Interview 5, June 2018).

As discussed above, some women could still be ideologically convinced that the Islamic State is worth fighting for and therefore wish to stay inside the remaining areas under IS-control. Moreover, as the women have been taken care of by their husbands and their movements have been restricted, they have been protected from direct insights of the cruelty of the Islamic State, and therefore could have fewer incentives for leaving (Interview 9, July 2018). Another explanation could be that they fear the legal punishments of returning to their home country, and feel like their options are limited if they return. This feeling of no future in their home countries is especially relevant for the Norwegian women because of the penal code\(^3\) in the country. In 2016, Norway became the first country in Scandinavia to introduce a general criminalization of foreign fighters, which makes it illegal, according to Norwegian law, to participate in an armed conflict outside of Norway on behalf of non-state actors. The concept of participation in this law can be broadly interpreted in the sense that it does not specify which behavior is covered by the participation-concept. The consequence of this is to criminalize participation that involves more secluded roles, such as supplying combatants with food. In view of the Norwegian women who have traveled to Syria, the concept of participation will probably include women who have contributed to a military group by cooking or repairing clothes for their fighting husbands, and not actually participating in fighting themselves (Høgestøl, 2018, p. 48-51). This is relevant for all of the women, who have married men inside the Islamic State which are most likely fighting or involved in other institutional aspects of running the proto-state. Moreover, this research has disclosed that some of the women have tried to recruit other women in Norway through their personal social media. Some women have also worked in a hospital run by the Islamic State, and it could be discussed to which degree these actions can be considered legal under the Norwegian penal code. In a recent interview, the Norwegian Minister of Justice warns that the Norwegian women can expect to be investigated and prosecuted if they come back (TV2, 2018a). Lars Gule, who has followed the trials of the male returnees, believes that “if the women return, they will most likely be prosecuted and sentenced after the provision on participation in a terrorist organization in the penal code, especially if they have tried to recruit others or have worked inside the Islamic State’s institutions” (Interview 9, July 2018), which this study found to be true for some of the women. What will happen to these women if they choose to

\(^3\) The Norwegian Penal Code can be found in Appendix 2.
return is a question this thesis is unable to answer, but the interviewees that once were close friends with the women hope and believe that they will be prosecuted and sentenced if they come back (Interview 3, April 2018; Interview 8, July 2018).
6 Conclusion
The Islamic State has managed to attract a large number of women from all over the world through the establishment of a so-called caliphate in 2014. The question of what made these women leave their comfortable life in the West behind to join a terrorist organization has been much debated, both in terms of the process towards radicalization, their motivations, and roles. Moreover, as IS has faced major setbacks in recent times, some individuals have returned home, but women return at a lower rate than men. This thesis has studied the phenomenon of female participation in terrorism through a case study of the Norwegian women in the Islamic State, with the aim to outline their radicalization processes, their motivations, as well as what the Islamic State is offering women from the West. The study was guided by three research questions which aimed to shed light on the phenomenon of Norwegian muhajirat. To be able to meet these objectives, the foundation of the thesis was built on primary data collected through interviews, supported by established literature on the topic, and guided by the conceptual and theoretical framework.

The first section of the analysis chapter begun by outlining the women’s radicalization processes building on the information provided through the interviews. Wiktorowicz’s Al-Muhajiroun model served as the main analytical tool for this chapter, as well as drawing from other theoretical approaches to radicalization, and building upon the literature review presented in chapter two. While experiencing personal crises such as loss of family members, divorce, and yearning redemption, the majority of the interviewees emphasized the political and social/cultural crises in the women’s lives as what may have prompted a cognitive opening. However, the level of causality between these crises and their decision to migrate is difficult to establish, as some women directly related their decision to travel to the crises they have experienced, whilst for others, these crises seem to have been mere contributing factors for their decision to go. The religious seeking varied between the women, while some had actively been searching for answers for years, others had recently begun practicing Islam more strictly and started their search around the same time the caliphate was declared. Like some interviewees argued, propaganda disseminated by the IS and online interaction with IS-members could have affected these women to make their decision, however, these interactions and happenings seem at most to be secondary to the personal and real-life relationships in the radicalization process of these women. Most of the women evidently adopted the frames presented by IS, arguing that hijrah was obligatory upon all Muslims. Whilst the data gathered was unable to capture the social interaction of all the women, the socialization
process seems to have been important for the majority of the women, and in some cases described as what initiated the radicalization process. Therefore, the various stages presented in Wiktorowicz’s model did not necessarily happen in a linear manner like the theory proposes, as socialization, frame alignment and indoctrination could have happened simultaneously for some of the women. Furthermore, while the model presents a useful framework for understanding the process of radicalization, it is unsuccessful in explaining what makes some individual radicalize, whilst others don’t. For the women who did not leave to join the Islamic State, an obligation to the people around them as well as failure to adopt the frames presented by IS seem to have been the most important factors stopping them. The role of men in women’s radicalization has been a much-debated aspect of understanding women’s pathway to the Islamic State. This study found that for the women which left, the male influence was at best a minor explanation for their choice to join IS, and in some cases not a factor at all. However, for one of the women which considered leaving, the male influence was the primary reason. It is important to emphasize the difference in the women’s radicalization processes, and although some commonalities were found, more research is needed to understand the multi-faceted and complex magnitude of radicalization of women in the Norwegian context.

The second section of the chapter focused on the promises of the Islamic State, and what it offers women compared to that of secular emancipation for women. The study found that IS promise women an environment or safe-haven where they are free to practice religion without discrimination or harassment. Since the majority of the women felt some form of alienation from the Norwegian society, due to factors such as discrimination, racism, and harassment because of their religious identity, there are reasonable grounds to assume that the promises of IS seemed tempting. Moreover, as some of the women felt left out of the Western feminist agenda, and felt like they were viewed as a lesser feminist because of their religion and choice to cover, the promise of divine redemption compared to that of secular emancipation represented an alternative narrative which could resonate strongly with Muslim women, as some of the interviewees described. The Islamic State has also successfully established gender-segregated parallel institutions, effectively incorporating women into the organization’s different institutions. These conditions presented the Norwegian women with opportunities unattainable in the West, but also emphasized their roles as wives and mothers.
The final section of the chapter set out to outline the women’s motivations for joining the Islamic State and for not returning. When focusing on the motivations for leaving, three prevailing motivations began to emerge, which can be categorized into grievances, solutions and personal motivations. The study found that grievances or push factors were emphasized throughout all the interviews, particularly the feeling of alienation and non-belonging. Outrage over what was happening to Muslims in Syria and international inaction was also accentuated as important elements in explaining motivations. Moreover, migration to the Islamic State was seen as both a solution to these perceived grievances, and as an obligatory act by the majority of the women, indicating that ideological factors had some presence in their motivations, but the study was unable to capture the extent of this ideological factor. As for personal motivations, redemption was frequently cited as a major motivation in the women’s choice to migrate, along with a search for identity. Some of these women were also actively seeking recognition and status, motivations commonly prescribed to men. The analysis suggested that motivations may have changed, and some of the women have expressed a desire to return to Norway. An eventual return may be inhibited by physical or psychological obstacles, as well as fearing repercussions in Norway.

This thesis finds that these women did not make a decision in a vacuum. They were reacting to the world around them, balancing their social, political and religious life in the West, and responded according to what seemed like the best solution at the time after considering their options. The gender-specific interpretation of Jihad, which prescribe different roles to men and women, does not necessarily deprive these women of agency. While it could be argued that these women contribute to their own subordination by adhering to the strict interpretation of Shariah, they demonstrated agency by actively rejecting the religious interpretation and gender roles of their parents, and at the same time detangling themselves from Western, secular gender patterns. This thesis therefore argues that these women should be considered active agents in their decision to join the Islamic State and that the reductionist narratives of women as victims or jihadi brides only impedes our understanding of the phenomenon.

Because of the relatively modest scale of this thesis, more research and long-term studies are needed to further understand the phenomenon of women in the Islamic State and the Norwegian context. Given the lack of available information on this case and the obstacles to finding relevant participants, understanding the complexity and magnitude of this topic is difficult. As this study was unable to collect primary data on all of the women, and because it
did not collect data from the women themselves, generalization is not possible. However, the information and data collected through the interviewees in this thesis, can contribute to developing a gendered approach to radicalization, and the insights from the participants of this study can inform our understanding not only of radicalized individuals but also regarding discrimination, alienation, and protection of religious freedom in the Norwegian society.
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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Interviews

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<th>Interview Number</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Informant</th>
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<td>Anonymous Friend</td>
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<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>07.03.2018</td>
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<td>Ikhlaque Chan, Bærum Municipality</td>
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<td>Interview 6</td>
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<td>Interview 7</td>
<td>17.06.2018</td>
<td>Anonymous Woman</td>
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<td>Interview 8</td>
<td>15.07.2018</td>
<td>Anonymous Friend</td>
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<td>Interview 9</td>
<td>19.07.2018</td>
<td>Lars Gule, OsloMet</td>
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Appendix 2: The Norwegian Penal Code

English:

§ 145. Participation in military activity in an armed conflict abroad

Any person who illegally participates in military activities in an armed conflict abroad shall be subject to a penalty of imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 years, unless such person participates on behalf of a government force.

Any person who intends to carry out an offence specified in the first paragraph and who initiates a journey to the area or commits other acts that facilitate and point towards carrying out the offence shall be subject to punishment for attempt. The attempt is punishable by a milder penalty than is a completed violation. Section 16, second paragraph, applies correspondingly.


Norwegian:

§ 145.Deltakelse i militær virksomhet i væpnet konflikt i utlandet

Den som på rettsstridig måte deltar i militær virksomhet i en væpnet konflikt i utlandet, straffes med fengsel inntil 6 år, med mindre vedkommende deltar på vegne av en statlig styrke.

Den som har forsett om å fullbyrde et lovbrudd som nevnt i første ledd, og påbegynner sin reise til området eller foretar andre handlinger som legger til rette for og peker mot gjennomføringen, straffes for forsøk. Forsøket straffes mildere enn fullbyrdet overtredelse. § 16 annet ledd gjelder tilsvarende.

(Jf. Straffeloven [Strl.] 20-28/5 2005 Nr. 65 §§ 145)